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## Ethiopia

**Post:** Addis Ababa

### Tomato Production in Ethiopia Challenged by Pest

**Report Categories:**

Pest/Disease Occurrences

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**Report Highlights:**

Ethiopia's tomato production is being adversely affected by *Tuta Absoluta*, commonly called Tomato Leafminer (TLM) moth. This disease is suspected to have come from Yemen and entered into Ethiopia via the northern part of the country. TLM is now spreading fast into major tomato producing regions including Oromia and Somali with about 50 to 60% of the country's total tomato production in jeopardy. While efforts to control the spread of the disease are on-going, there is no pesticide or chemical identified by the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) for controlling the TLM infestation. With the TLM still uncontrolled and spreading, local market prices of tomato are rising very sharply. In the past three months, local market tomatoes prices have increased by 233%.

## **General Information:**

The Government of Ethiopia (GOE) is pursuing an ambitious Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) that foresees Ethiopia in the bracket of a middle income country by 2020. Owing to the fact that Ethiopia has vast potential for agricultural production, the GTP primarily focuses on boosting agricultural production. Thus, one of the strategies identified in the GTP is “scaling up small holder farmers’ best agricultural practices and raising the productivity level of most average farmers to a level closer to the productivity of the best farmers.” Another key strategy of the GTP is the expansion of irrigation practices to attain annual double cropping, coupled with promotion of high value industrial crops. Vegetable production in the country’s fertile areas is also a strategy envisioned to help realize the GTP.

Tomatoes are among the vegetables identified in the GTP as a high value vegetable. Tomatoes in Ethiopia are produced mainly in the northern and central rift valley areas. In recent years, commercial tomato production has significantly expanded since national agricultural strategies began favoring high value cash crops. The total area of land estimated to be covered by tomato farms in 2011/12 Marketing Year (MY) is 7,255 ha with an estimated yield of 81,970 MT (11.3MT/ha). Oromia region contributes the lion’s share of Ethiopia’s total tomato production (56, 279 MT or 68%) with the remaining production coming from Meki (9%), Tigray (5%) and Somali region (4%). It is estimated that more than 254, 000 farmers are engaged in tomato farming.

## **Occurrence of TLM**

One of the major challenges observed in Ethiopian tomato production in recent months is the prevalence of TLM infestation in several tomato growing regions. The pest is under the order of Lepidoptera and Gelechiidae family. It is a very small silver grey moth with black spots. TLM is 5-7mm long and has a wing span of 8-10mm. TLM damages leaves and tomatoes which may result in significant production losses ranging from 50-100%. A TLM infested tomato very quickly becomes red and rotten. Some tomatoes even look healthy on the outside but shrink in size and harden. TLM also changes tomatoes’ color to greenish black and makes the tomato fall from the stem prematurely.

TLM is believed to have entered into Ethiopia some seven months ago via the northern part of the country, likely from Yemen, a country severely affected by infestations of TLM. The disease started infecting tomato farms in the northern part of Ethiopia and in no time spread over to the Somali and Oromia regions, the latter of which accounts for most of the country’s tomato production. It is estimated that 29,000 quintals of tomato produced in the Somali region are infected by the virus. Tomatoes produced in this area are suspected to have already been distributed in the local market. The fact that tomato production in Ethiopia is hit by TLM is already impacting local market prices. When compared to price levels three months ago, tomato prices have increased sharply, climbing from 30 cents USD/kg to around 1USD/kg.

## **Efforts to Control TLM**

Both Ethiopian commercial farmers as well as small holder farmers of tomatoes have relentlessly tried to control the spread of the disease through the use of different chemicals and pesticides available in the local market. Some farmers have spent large sums of money on purchasing chemicals costing as much as 25,000 Birr per liter (\$1,250/ liter) but to no avail, as most of the chemicals failed to control the spread of TLM infestation. According to reports from some farmers near Addis Ababa, the only pesticide that has been relatively effective in the control of TLM is Coragen 200 SC, which is widely used on Ethiopian flower farms. However, there is no specific pesticide or chemical that the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) formally recognizes as a cure for the control of TLM infestation on tomatoes.

It is also observed that some pesticide and chemical dealers in Addis Ababa have claimed that their chemicals are cures for TLM and have sold them to tomato farmers at expensive prices. However, when applied on tomatoes, the chemicals have no effect on controlling the spread of TLM. Therefore, along with the lack of appropriate pesticides and chemicals, the prevalence of illegal pesticide dealers has aggravated the rate of infestation.

The MOA's Animal and Plant Health Regulatory Directorate is planning to conduct training for tomato farmers on controlling the spread of TLM. It also plans to support tomato producing farmers' efforts by sharing the best practices of some other tomato growing countries in controlling the damaging effects of TLM. The MOA also aspires to collaborate with the Ministry of Trade (MOT) to regulate and take action on illegal pesticide dealers.