



Immediate Press Release

India Successfully Safeguards its Agriculture & Farmers against Fall Armyworm

- Mobilizes nationwide extension system to implement IPM based grassroots action
- Empowers thousands of smallholder maize farmers to fight the menace of fall armyworm
- Salvages maize production in 2019-20 from invasive fall armyworm
- SABC releases “SAFFAL Impact Report 2019-20” on the successful management of FAW

New Delhi (6 June 2020) - *Spodoptera frugiperda*, a.k.a Fall Armyworm (FAW) – a highly invasive pest with substantial appetite, landed on Indian soils for the first time in May 2018. The pest quickly became a nationwide nuisance. By the end of 2018, FAW spread across the major maize growing regions and emerged as a significant threat to Indian farmers and agriculture. The early emergence in the crop life cycle, voracious feeding habit, large-scale aggressive behavior, high reproduction, fast migration, and irreversible nature of crop damage, all made FAW a key pest. Notably, the FAW fed on many host plants and was found on sweet corn, baby corn, maize, sugarcane, and sorghum, with the potential to feed on many other agriculturally important food and feed crops in India. By early 2019, the FAW pest was reported in the states of Karnataka, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and West Bengal.

Consequently, the availability of maize contracted significantly, resulting in the spike in prices of maize in the domestic market, demand-supply imbalance. It also triggered the tendering for imported maize to meet growing demand from poultry, animal feed, and starch industry. As FAW threatened the already ascending production graph of maize and future of maize farmers in India in 2018, the South Asia Biotechnology Centre (SABC) launched a massive program “Safeguarding Agriculture & Farmers against Fall Armyworm (SAFFAL),” a multi-year project supported by FMC Corporation in March 2019. Pramod Thota, President, FMC India, while holding the collaboration as invaluable said, *“FMC India, as a responsible research-based leader in crop protection, is committed to supporting Sustainable Agriculture in India. Project SAFFAL is another of FMC’s initiatives that aim to empower Indian farmers to protect their crops against such dreaded pests, such as Fall Armyworm, leading to enhanced farmers’ income and farm sustainability. We are proud to be partnering SABC in this endeavor with Project SAFFAL.”*

Project SAFFAL, along with the Government machinery and extension systems, helped towards effective management and control of voracious FAW. Moreover, thousands of farmers were trained in good agricultural practices throughout different maize growing regions in India. *“Contrary to the notion of failure of the agri-extension system in the power corridor of Krishi Bhawan, we have witnessed a noticeable revolution in the agri-extension system in the hinterlands to address the problem of pestilence fall armyworm. The concerted efforts from different agencies including ICAR institutions, KVKs, SAUs, and State Agri Departments & NGOs helped avert threat to socio-economic, food & feed security in India”*, said Dr. CD Mayee, President of South Asia Biotechnology Centre (SABC), who successfully led a country-wide project on FAW. As a result of all the hard work in Kharif/Rabi 2019-20, India achieved a record maize production at 28.98 million tons. Today, SABC releases the impact report on SAFFAL’s journey across multiple farming communities in India. It is a testament to the resilience of the farming community, a functional nationwide extension system, and a true model of public-private partnership in the agricultural extension system.

In cohesion with the different initiatives by Central as well as States Government agencies, project SAFFAL successfully addressed the farmer's informational needs in a targeted manner. The efforts appealed to the different information delivery channels, reaching the farmers through mass media, customized information material, demonstrations, active helplines, social media, and maize expert networks. Active farmer engagement and their demonstrated efficiency in controlling an exotic pest upon the first instance of infestation showed the efficient relay of information. Indian farmers also tended to actively uptake information across different channels accessed by them regularly. Additionally, the regular assessment of conditions through surveys also facilitated the adjustment of recommendations.

The community based participatory efforts distilled down to educating the farmers in effective integrated pest management (IPM) strategies to help restrain possible damages. To further strengthen the aim and objectives of Project SAFFAL, strong support from Government functionaries remains large. SABC successfully addressed the issues of availability of both botanical, biological, and chemical-based solutions, and advocated for affordable solutions. SABC also reached out to the Govt of India to either subsidize or exempt the IPM inputs such as pheromone traps and lures, safety kit (PPE), botanicals, biologicals, and safer agriculture pesticides from Goods & Services Tax (GST) regime. Currently, such inputs promoting the cause of organic farming are placed under 18 % GST. Moreover, based on the ground reality, SABC reached out to the Govt of India to expedite the registration of the new and safe chemicals to help ensure compulsory seed treatment before making seeds available to farmers.

The key deliverable of the Project SAFFAL in 2019-20:

- **Outreach & Geographical Reach** - Successful completion of 15 educational cum awareness programs on Fall Armyworm spreading over 11 maize growing States
- **Public-Private Partnership** - Established collaboration with 40 public sector institutions including SAUs, KVKs, ICAR-Institutions, AICRP Maize, ICAR-ATMA; State Department of Agriculture
- **Direct & Indirect Farmers Training** - In-depth training of >7,050 maize farmers; indirectly reaching out to ~ 3,08,000 farmers, extension officials & other key stakeholders
- **FAW Vernacular Posters** – More than 20,000 posters in 8 languages distributed in 11 maize growing States
- **Pheromone Traps/Lures & FAW Soft Toys** - Distribution of 2,700 pheromone traps & lures & 2000 soft toys indicating FAW identification marks to progressive farmers, extension officials of KVK & State Agri Dept, and Entomologist of respective partner institutions & live demonstration of its usages
- **PPE/Safety Kits** - Distribution of 400 personal protective equipment (PPE)/safety kits, and live demonstration of its usages
- **Project SAFFAL Website** - Launching of an exclusive website on fall armyworm in India: www.fallarmyworm.org.in

The impact report highlights the minute details of the delivery and impact of Project SAFFAL.

About SABC: The South Asia Biotechnology Centre (www.sabc.asia) is a not-for-profit scientific organization that aims at serving as a knowledge hub, helps in bridging the knowledge gap between science and society, and facilitates the transfer of innovative farm technologies from the lab to the land. A dedicated web portal on Fall Armyworm for India: www.fallarmyworm.org.in

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