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**Radio spots on the desert locust situation in East Africa**

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**Notes to broadcaster:**

This series of eight radio spots addresses the desert locust outbreak in East Africa in 2020. *(An additional spot was added in April to address the second wave.)* The spots provide some facts that can help broadcasters and farmers understand the situation better, know what caused it, and know what kinds of actions are most useful. Hopefully, they can also help to ease some fears and correct some misconceptions.

It’s important to note that the current number of locusts is only a small fraction of the number that might sweep through Eastern Africa in the March to June cropping season unless something is done very quickly. Adult locusts are already laying eggs in northern Somalia and will lay eggs in the coming weeks in Ethiopia, Kenya, and other areas. These eggs will hatch in time for the cropping season in East Africa and locust numbers could be at least 20 times the size of the current outbreak. The eggs are laid underground. Therefore, they cannot be reached by pesticide applications and need to be controlled with pesticides after they emerge from the soil. However, there are fungus-based biopesticides such as Green Muscle or Novacrid that have been formulated specifically to target the breeding speed of locusts. After infecting the locusts, they stop feeding and eventually die. Over time, breeding should decline. The locust problem is not a one-country problem; it’s a regional problem and requires regional coordination.

As a broadcaster, you could air these spots at any time you know farmers are listening. This could be during your regular farmer program or during other programs you know farmers listen to.

The locust outbreak affects everyone, not just farmers. It affects food security for all. So, for example, these radio spots could also be aired during, before, or after news programs.

You could also use them to stimulate discussions about the locust situation in your area. Invite experts to speak about the situation. Invite farmers to call in and talk about their experiences and ask questions.

One other thing you can do as a broadcaster is to try to learn when aerial spraying might occur in your coverage area and let listeners know that they should go inside when spraying is taking place.

**Spot #1**

Why are locusts so damaging? Here are five facts:

One: Locusts eat a wide variety of vegetation—and many types of crops.

Two: There are 40-80 million locusts in every square kilometre of a locust swarm, weighing 80-160 tonnes.

Three: Each individual locust can eat their body weight in vegetation every day. To put this is perspective, half a million locusts weigh about one tonne and can consume about one tonne of food, enough to feed 2,500 people for one day.

Four: Locust swarms can fly up to 150 km per day.

Five: Every stage of the locust is potentially harmful. Adults feed the most and can lay eggs, while immature “hopper bands” don’t feed as much but soon develop into damaging swarms.

**Spot #2**

Every few decades, countries in East Africa experience a particularly bad locust year—a time when the insects devastate crops. 2020 is one such year.

Why are locust outbreaks bad one year and not another year? Is it an act of God? Is there a moral or religious reason?

It’s mainly because of the weather. This year, unusually heavy rains and an increased number of cyclones in the Indian Ocean have created perfect conditions for locusts to breed. Heavy rain triggers the growth of vegetation in the arid areas where desert locusts grow and reproduce. Also, there is insecurity in locust breeding areas, which has blocked aerial spraying in these places. As a result, locust numbers have increased and then dispersed as swarms to invade new areas.

**Spot #3**

Locusts do not attack people or animals. There is no evidence that locusts carry diseases that could harm humans, although a few people might have allergic reactions to them.

**Spot #4**

The most effective method to manage huge locust swarms is to spray pesticides aerially from an airplane, coupled with ground applications. While the actions of individual farmers with knapsack- or vehicle-mounted sprayers might reduce locust damage a little, the most effective way to manage locust swarms is to spray pesticides by airplane There are just too many locusts for other measures to be as effective as aerial spraying. This requires a lot of investment and complicated logistics that in most cases only the government can provide.

But some of the pesticides that are sprayed by airplane could have negative impacts on human health.

It’s important to carefully scout locust populations to ensure that spraying is targeted precisely at the locusts. Inform extension officers when you spot locusts, especially the “hopper bands” of young locusts on the ground that are difficult to spot from above.

If spraying is happening in your area, stay indoors until the spraying is finished. And make sure your family stays indoors.

Also, it’s a good idea to wait some weeks before eating any crops that have been aerially sprayed.

**Spot #5:**

There are many ideas about how to stop locusts. Some farmers resort to making noise, throwing stones, constructing scarecrows, or even eating the insects. These actions may have a slight effect, but they are not nearly effective enough to substantially reduce the damage caused by locusts.

The only way to substantially prevent or reduce damage is to have early warning of the location of locust swarms, be prepared, and apply pesticides by airplane. And remember: spraying can only reduce the impact of swarms in the immediate area. It doesn’t address continuous multiplication in the breeding areas that results in new, and very likely larger, populations. To manage breeding areas, methods such as spraying with biopesticides is more sustainable. There are fungus-based products such as Green Muscle or Novacrid that have been formulated specifically for locusts.

**Spot #6**

In several countries, people collect locusts with large nets, light traps, or in other ways. Locusts are then stir-fried, roasted, or boiled. They may be eaten immediately or dried and eaten later. Locusts are very rich in protein and are reported to have some health benefits. Also, they can be eaten not only by humans but formulated and fed to poultry, pigs, and other livestock as a source of protein. Catching and eating locusts will not significantly affect their populations, but it can contribute to a protein-rich diet. But don’t eat locusts after they’ve been sprayed with pesticides. That is not safe.

**Spot #7**

Important tips for using pesticides to manage locusts

1. Ensure that you only use pesticides that are specifically recommended or registered for the desert locust.

2. Use the formulation of the product that’s recommended for the situation in your area.

3. Use the type of sprayer that is recommended for the product and the nozzle that is best suited to the sprayer.

4. Spray at the recommended time of day and only under appropriate weather conditions.

5. Make sure you appropriately dilute and/or mix the ingredients in the formulation. Follow the directions on the label!

6. It’s crucial that aerial spraying by planes (or drones) be conducted at the recommended flying height.

7. Only use experienced personnel to apply pesticides for locust management.

**Spot #8**

Farmers, a new and larger wave of locusts is coming. The generation of locusts that damaged crops in January and February has been breeding and their eggs have hatched. Adult swarms are forming and will soon be feeding. This new wave of locusts could be many times larger than the previous one. Alert your local authorities when you see bands of hoppers in your area so that they can take swift action. And stay safe by being indoors during spraying.

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