

Avoid Ratooning for the control of sugarcane whipsmut

Recognize the problem

Whipsmut is a major disease of sugarcane. It is caused by a fungus that produces a thin white and papery membrane on young shoots, and makes the end of the shoot curve inwards like a black whip when the crop is mature. When the fungus is older, many of the small spores on the black whip can be spread by wind, especially when the wind is strong. When a young plant is affected by whipsmut, the cane is short, stiff and produces more tillers than healthy plants do. Infected plants will eventually die.

Background

Ratooning is a practice that helps the crop to produce more sugarcane, by cutting the shoot when it is mature. The stub grows again and produces more sugarcane material that can be sold.

If a plant is infected with whipsmut, the fungus will stay on the plant when it is cut for the next growth. The disease will therefore remain from one growth to the other and will affect the production of the crop.

Management

Ratooning should not be practised if the disease is present in the field.

Signs of smut (*Ustilago scitaminea*) on sugarcane in Thailand. (Photo by William M. Brown Jr., Bugwood)



Scientific name(s) > *Ustilago sp.*

The recommendations in this factsheet are relevant to: Pakistan



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