

Reduce ratoon cotton to control cotton stainer

Recognize the problem

The cotton stainer is a bug, sometimes called the “red bug” or “red cotton stainer”. Adults have a dark pattern on their red backs but young ones are only red or pink. They can range from ¼ cm to 1 cm in length. The stainers attack cotton seeds and bolls. As they feed, the bugs produce a chemical that stains the lint. Attacked immature bolls will not reach maturity. Adults also feed on ripe cotton bolls drastically reducing the yield and quality of the cotton lint.

½ to 1 cm long young stainer bugs. (Photo by A.M. Varela)



Background

Cotton stainers are serious pests of cotton in all areas where cotton is grown in Zambia. Stainer bugs are late season pests. They appear when the bolls are ripening. After harvest, destruction of ratoon cotton (stubble crop after harvest) prevents the pest from overcoming the off-season (sleeping through dry period) because it will not have food. Destruction of ratoon cotton is important:

Adult stainer bugs. (Photo by Mark Yokoyama, CC BY NC ND)



“Farmers who fail to destroy the previous cotton plants in their fields by October 1 every year commit an offence because they contravene the Pest and Disease Act Cap 223, Section 31 of the Cotton regulation under the Laws of Zambia”. This law was enacted to prevent a dormancy of the pest in off-season and up-coming stainer populations the following season.

Management

- Uproot all the ratoon cotton (stubbles) after harvest.
- Uproot by late September at the latest.
- Make sure that even the roots are removed as they may allow the plant to regenerate, and to host stainers again.
- Bury the uprooted cotton and debris at least 0.5 m deep
- Alternatively, compost well as the compost heat will kill the stainers.
- Grow only one crop of cotton in a year to break the cycle of the pest

Scientific name(s) > *Dysdercus spp.*

The recommendations in this factsheet are relevant to: Zambia



Authors: Mathews Matimelo
Mount Makulu Research Station
tel: +260977601065 email: yamiko2006@yahoo.com

Edited by Plantwise.