

Management of *Aspergillus* in groundnuts

Recognize the problem

Aspergillus is a mould that infects groundnuts and other crops like beans and maize. It is commonly called 'Chuku'. When the mould grows on the kernels inside the shells it can produce a poison called aflatoxin.

Background

The mould survives on crop debris and in soil. It attacks the plants through wounds which happen during handling. Moist conditions allow the mould to grow quickly on the plants and in storage. Inside the plants, the mould produces an aflatoxin which contaminates the groundnuts. Aflatoxin can cause cancer in humans if eaten together with the contaminated food product. The immune system of people who eat the contaminated groundnuts is weakened, rendering their bodies more prone to infection.

Management

Aflatoxin contamination in groundnuts can be managed by reducing the amount of the mould, *Aspergillus* in the field and in storage.

In the field:

- Rotate groundnuts with other crops to reduce *Aspergillus* build-up in the soil
- Early planting of groundnuts allows the plant to grow fast and escape the mould
- Dry harvested pods well
- Handle the plants gently to avoid damaging the pods during harvest

In storage:

- Store groundnuts in their shells, this will protect them from the mould
- Dry the groundnuts well before bagging them
- Use dry clean bags to store groundnuts
- Store the nuts under dry environment (not directly on the floor)

Use:

- Always sort and discard discolored/mouldy nuts (Don't feed animals!)
- Sorting works!

Groundnuts kernels infected with fungus. (Photo by L. Matumba)



Groundnuts pods colonised by the fungus. (Photo by L. Matumba)



Scientific name(s) > *Aspergillus flavus*

The recommendations in this factsheet are relevant to: Malawi



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Edited by Plantwise.