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Management of aphids in cabbage

Recognize the problem

Aphids, commonly known as "*nsabwe*", cause great damage in cabbage and other leafy plant species. They are found on the underside of the leaves, young plants and interior part of cabbage bubbles where they survive in dry season. This leads to death of young plants, transmission of viral diseases and reduces the crop quality.

Grey aphids on underside of a cabbage leaf. (Photo by A. M. Varela, icipe)

Background

Cabbage aphids are very tiny with a green gray waxy coat. Some have wings but others are wingless. They have a simple lifecycle where female aphids give birth to live offspring. They suck the fluids from the plants and when the population increases, causes curling of the leaves. They contaminate the leaves or heads with mealy-grey masses. This makes it difficult to apply chemicals. Therefore there is a need to use several methods to combat the problem.

Management

There are three management options recommended to control aphid population build up as follows:

- Use the cultural practices to maintain high yields and quality:
  - Rotate cabbage fields with cereals such as maize for 4 seasons
  - Weeding as soon as they appear (some weeds may harbour aphids)
  - Use correct spacing in nurseries of 15cm apart per row and 60cm by 60cm for big headed varieties when transplanting
  - Restrict movements of people from infested areas or fields
  - Uproot and burn all infected plants or previous crop residuals
- Biological control agents
  - Natural enemies like lady beetles and parasitic wasps assist in reducing populations of aphids
  - When the number is low, use hand picking to kill the live aphids.
- Chemical control
  - Apply Dimethoate at the rate of 17mls in 14 liters water in knapsack

NB: Scout the fields every week and combine several management options.

When using a pesticide, always wear protective clothing and follow the instructions on the product label, such as dosage, timing of application, and pre-harvest interval.

Scientific name(s) > ***Brevicoryne brassicae***

The recommendations in this factsheet are relevant to: All Countries

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