

Video: Scientists work to stop moth from destroying world's tomato crop

February 6 2014, by Rich Mathieson

In countries around the world, a tiny insect is wreaking havoc on farms and threatening to push up the price of tomatoes. At a recent workshop in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, scientists gathered to learn more about the tomato leafminer and ways to combat it.

Since the moth was detected in Ethiopia, the price of tomatoes there has risen fivefold, and the [economic damage](#) is just going to get worse, according to Muni Muniappan, who organized the workshop. He said farmers and scientists across East Africa and South Asia need to be taught to recognize the pest, also known as *Tuta absoluta*, so that as soon as it is discovered, they can take appropriate measures to prevent widespread damage.

After seeing the leafminer in action in tomato fields outside Addis Ababa, workshop participants drew up recommendations to be distributed to policymakers and [government officials](#) in the region.

"If this pest isn't controlled, it can cause serious economic damage to the countries it has invaded," Muniappan said.

The insect, native to South America, crossed the Atlantic in 2006, when it was identified in Spain. It has since spread throughout most of Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, Senegal, Sudan, and Ethiopia.

Muniappan directs the USAID-funded Integrated Pest Management Innovation Lab, managed by the Office of International Research,

Education, and Development at Virginia Tech.

Provided by Virginia Tech

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