

EXOTIC PEST FACT SHEET 3

Sweet Potato Weevil (*Cylas formicarius*)

What are the main hosts?

The major economic host for sweet potato weevil is sweet potato, or kumara. Other hosts include taro. The sweet potato weevil causes damage that can result in crop losses ranging from 5 – 97%.

What do they look like?

Single eggs are deposited in small cavities in the stem or storage roots (tuber), often near the juncture of the stem and tuber. The egg is oval, creamy white and about 0.6 mm long. Larvae are white with a brown head, legless and up to 9 mm long (Fig 1). The body, legs and head of the adult are long and thin giving it the appearance of an ant with a snout. Their head and rear are metallic blue or black, and their middle, legs and feelers are orange/reddish brown. Adults can be up to 8mm in length (Fig 2).

Why are they an issue?

Larvae cause the most damage by tunnelling through the stems and tubers (Fig 3). Infested tubers are often riddled with cavities, spongy in appearance, and dark in colour which may facilitate entry of soil borne diseases. Even low levels of feeding induce a chemical reaction that makes the tubers taste bitter and smell, making them unpalatable.

What should I look for?

Infestations may reduce overall plant vigour. Larvae tunnelling through stems may cause stems to thicken, crack, or collapse, and leaves to become pale green. However, a heavy infestation is usually necessary before these symptoms are apparent.

How do they spread?

Sweet potato weevils can be spread via infested host plants, in particular planting material, as the eggs are laid in the stem or tuber.

Where are they present?

Sweet potato weevil is present in Asia, many parts of Africa, North, Central and northern South America, the Caribbean, and Oceania including Australia, but not New Zealand.



Fig 1. Larvae of sweet potato weevil

How can I protect my industry?

Check your production sites frequently for the presence of new diseases and unusual symptoms. Make sure you are familiar with common pests and diseases of your industry so you can recognise something different.



Fig 2. Adult sweet potato weevil.



Fig 3. Damage to sweet potato tuber caused by larval feeding by the sweet potato weevil

Images: UF/IFAS, Featured Creatures – sweet potato weevil, January 2015
http://entnemdept.ufl.edu/creatures/veg/potato/sweetpotato_weevil.htm#intro

Version 7. April 2023