

Invasive insect 'Thrips' destroys chilli crop, farmers' hopes

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A chilli field (Representational Image | EPS)

By Vivek Bhoomi

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HYDERABAD: A new invasive species of insect from Indonesia is rapidly spreading across the State for the past few weeks, destroying chilli crop and catching farmers as well as scientists off-guard.

The damage has been so extensive that worried farmers in Warangal districts are ploughing their chilli fields during the harvest stage itself.

Earlier, *Scirtothrips dorsalis* and *Thrips hawaiiensis* had been the common insects affecting chilli crop, but the new species of insect called 'Thrips parvispinous,' which originated in Indonesia and was first seen in India in 2015, has made a resurgence in several States. The insect has built resistance against pesticides.



The invasive insect 'Thrips parvispinous' that is rapidly proliferating and destroying chilli crops in Telangana

Each female Thrips lays around 150 eggs through Parthenogenesis (without requiring the male) and sucks the sap of leaf, flower and also the fruit, causing extensive damage to the crop within no time. Damage to chilli crops has been observed between 30 to 70 per cent at various fields in Telangana where the crop has come for harvest.

Though it was seen in some chilli crops in January 2021, scientists did not predict that it would cause damage at such a large scale.

Samples have been collected by scientists and sent to the National Bureau of Agricultural Insect Resources (NBAIR) in Bengaluru for the genome sequencing of the insect.

According to Dr. Shahanaz, Assistant Professor, Department of Entomology, College of Horticulture, Mojerla, who has visited the affected farms in Jogulamba Gadwal district, indiscriminate use of pesticides by farmers knowingly or unknowingly, has been the main reason for the insect developing resistance to pesticides and their 'natural enemies' in the field terminated due to use of pesticides.

Scientists are advising farmers to implement integrated pest management practices like spraying neem oil and using bio-pesticides as an immediate remedy, and to install sticky-blue traps in the field to attract and trap the Thrips.

Farmers are being advised not to use synthetic pyrethroids, organophosphates and other growth-enhancing fertilisers, which would only aggravate the situation further.

“We have been advising farmers to rotate crops. We also tell them to grow plants like maize and jowar on the borders, so that the natural enemies of Thrips can thrive. But farmers prefer profitability,” Dr. Shahanaz said.

Chilli crop is being grown in 10 districts across Telangana in around 3.59 lakh acres this year, which is 1.19 lakh acres more compared to last year. The present damage caused to chilli crop across the country is expected to affect export, which was 6,01,500 tonnes and worth `8,430 crore in 2020-21.

Source: <https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/telangana/2021/dec/06/invasive-insect-thrips-destroys-chilli-crop-farmers-hopes-2392254.html>