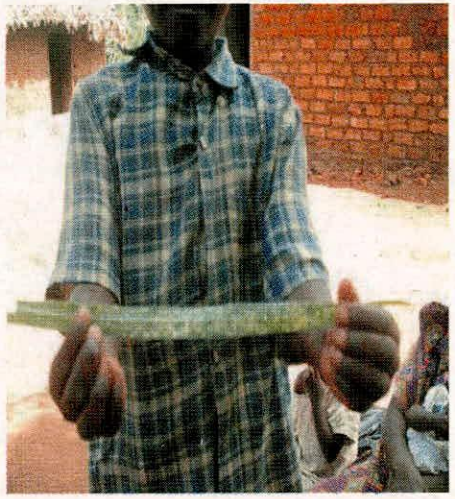
Let us join hands to contain these problems before they become crises

ASPS
Danida

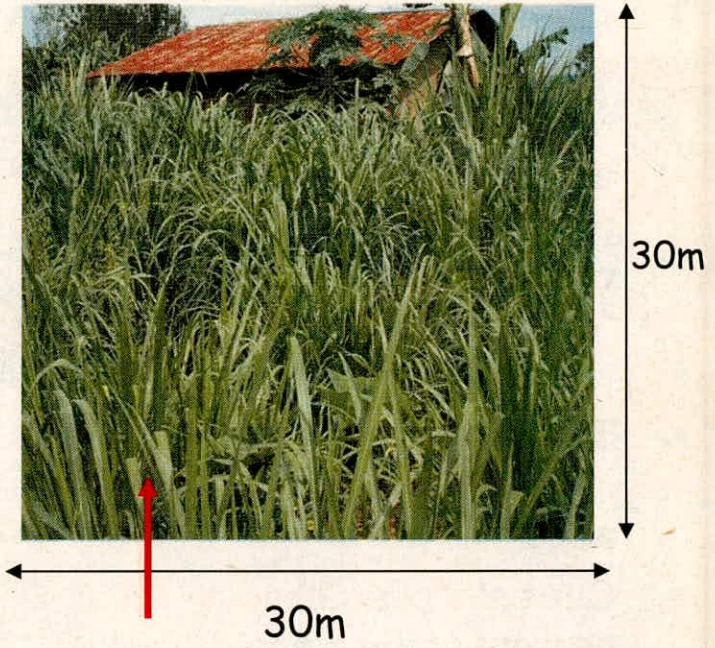


NARO

NEW DISEASE AND PEST ON ELEPHANT GRASS IN UGANDA

IMPORTANCE OF ELEPHANT GRASS

Elephant grass, sometimes called Napier grass was introduced in Uganda in the 1960s. It is currently the backbone of the smallholder dairy industry in Uganda. This is because it is the main source of feed for the zero-grazing cows. It is a good practice for people who keep zero-grazing cows to have at least 0.9ha of a healthy crop of elephant grass.



Elephant grass free of pests and diseases ready for harvesting for feed. A poor crop such as in the background can be improved by returning the manure from the cow to the plot.

EMERGING PROBLEMS FOR LIVESTOCK FARMERS

A STRANGE DISEASE

- Since 2001, farmers in Masaka district have reported a new disease affecting their elephant grass which they commonly call "***Okugengewala***" (stunting disease).
- The disease is increasing in occurrence and severity
- Currently over 90 percent of the planted fields of elephant grass in the district have the disease.



A normal and a stunted/infected elephant grass stool

RECEIVED
17 MAR 2005
DIRECTOR - SAARI

ANOTHER PROBLEM NOW COMMONLY AFFECTING ELEPHANT GRASS IS A PEST

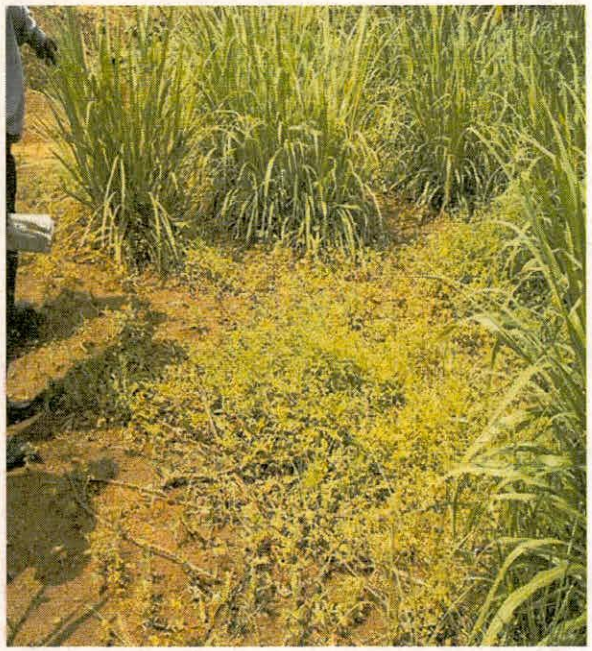
- They look like white spots on the leaves of elephant grass.
- NARO scientists suspect this problem to be a pest called mealybug
- Similar mealybugs occur on other crops such as sugarcane and cassava
- NARO scientists are in the process of identifying this pest



White spots on leaves of elephant grass

What can you do in the meantime?

- Uproot and burn all affected plants to reduce on the spread of the disease.



- This will obviously reduce on the number of plants you have on the plot and therefore the amount of forage from the plot.

- It is still better to have less forage than to have the disease that will eventually destroy all the crop.

- Plant clean / uninfected materials. NARO will endeavor to establish mother gardens of clean planting materials in some of the most affected districts.

GET ADVICE FROM YOUR EXTENSION STAFF IN THE DISTRICT

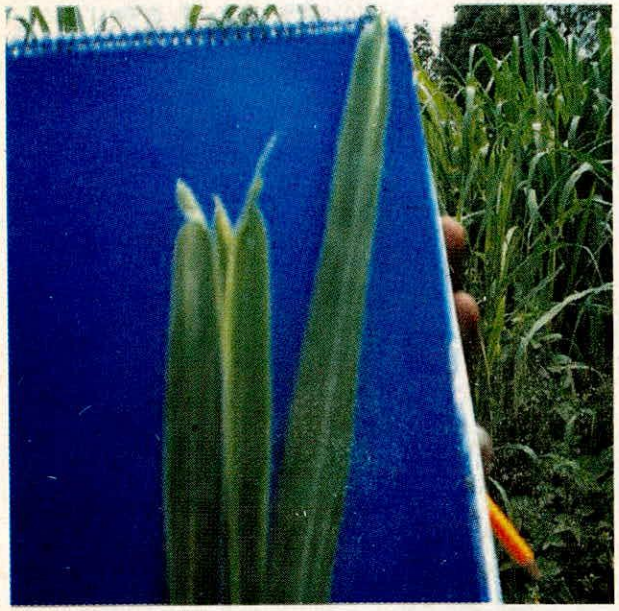
Symptoms of the Disease



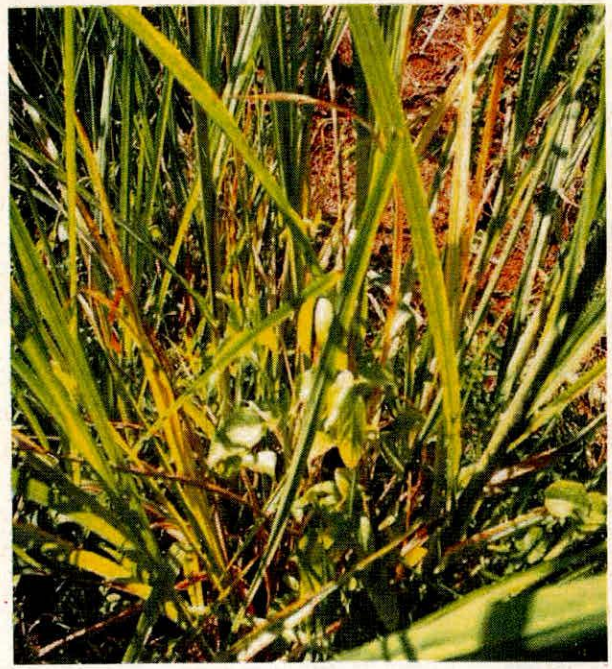
Affected elephant grass plants remain stunted, have short internodes, bunchy appearance and produce very low biomass yields



Twisting/curling along the mid-rib starting at leaf tips, leaves reduced to short sword like stubs



Twisting/curling of leaf tips. Leaves of some affected plants begin to dry at the edges and have a 'torn' appearance



Yellow/purple streaking starting at leaf tips. The yellowing should not be confused with yellowing due to poor soils

SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE OF THE DISEASE

- The disease is new on elephant grass and there is little information about it, including its name and cause. It is suspected to be caused by a germ similar to both bacteria and viruses. Scientists call this group of germs *Phytoplasma.*

- NARO scientists and partners have started investigations to identify the cause of the disease as the first step in developing ways of controlling it.

- NARO is interested in knowing how widespread the problem is and how it spreads within a field and from one field to another.

- Report cases that you have seen to the nearest District Agricultural Officer, Veterinary Officer or NAADS Coordinator.