Sweetpotato leaf folder (028)

Common Name
Sweetpotato leaf folder, green leaf folder

Scientific Name
Psara hipponalis; previously, Herpetogramma hipponalis

Distribution
Widespread. Common throughout Asia and Africa. It is recorded from Solomon Islands.

Hosts
Sweetpotato (Ipomoea batatas) is a major host. The caterpillars also occur on other Ipomoea species and Mikania cordata.

Symptoms & Life Cycle
The caterpillar does the damage. It folds the leaf, holding the folded parts together with webbing. The young caterpillars eat the surface of the leaf (Photo 1); later, when larger, they eat through the leaf creating small windows and holes (Photo 2).

The moth lays eggs singly or in groups on the upper surface of the leaf near the midrib. About 90 eggs are laid in a day. The eggs are shiny green, oblong, and covered with a scale-like gelatinous material. The eggs hatch after 3-5 days, and the caterpillars are at first greenish-yellow, turning darker green with age. They have a dark brown head. The caterpillars moult four times over 15-30 days and when mature are about 13 mm long. Only the larger caterpillars fold the leaves. In most cases, there is one caterpillar per leaf fold.

The caterpillars turn into yellowish-white pupae, which later become reddish brown. The adults emerge from the pupae in 4-8 days; they are yellowish-brown with dark brown zigzag markings on the wings (Photo 3). The female moth lives for about 3 days.

Impact
Often, the damage looks severe with all the youngest leaves folded (Photo 2), and they may turn brown, but there is no information on the
effect of leaf damage on storage root yield. Pruning experiments have shown that sweetpotato can lose up to a third of their leaves without impacting on yield., but more studies are needed to confirm this, and relate time of defoliation with storage root yield.

**Detection & inspection**

Look for leaves folded and held together with webbing; unfold the leaves and look for caterpillars and faecal pellets (‘droppings’). Look at the surface of the leaf for small windows between the veins caused by the caterpillar eating the upper surface of the leaf. The adult moth is brown with zigzag markings on the wings.

**Management**

**NATURAL ENEMIES**

Braconid wasps are common and control the leaf folder populations. They are seen rarely as they are so small. Earwigs and other predators are also important in maintaining natural control.

**CULTURAL CONTROL**

Before planting:

- The use of uninfested planting material is an effective means of reducing the incidence of leaf folders. Carefully choose cuttings for replanting; remove folded leaves or choose only those cuttings free of them.
- If possible, do not plant new gardens next to those that have high infestations of leaf folder, otherwise the moths will easily spread to the new gardens.

After harvest:

- Collect the vines and other debris and burn them, especially if caterpillars from an outbreak still remain on the vines

**CHEMICAL CONTROL**

The leaf folder is usually under natural control by its enemies. Pesticides are not recommended as they disrupt the action of the egg and larval parasites, and make matters worse. Also, there is no evidence that the leaf folder reduces storage root yields. However, if infestations become severe, and pesticides are thought to be needed, do the following:

- Use plant-derived products, such as neem, derris, pyrethrum and chilli (with the addition of soap), or synthetic products that contain disease-causing organisms, such as spinosad (Success) and Bt - *Bacillus thuringiensis* var. *kurstaki*.
- Note, a variety of *Derris*, brought many years ago to Solomon Islands from Papua New Guinea, is effective as a spray. It contains rotenone, an insecticide, so it should be used with caution. There may be varieties of *Derris* (fish poisons) in your country that can be tried (see Fact Sheet no. 56).
- Synthetic pyrethroids are likely to be effective, but will also kill natural enemies.

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Photo 3 Paul Hebert, BIO/CSIRO, Biodiversity Institute of Ontario.

Produced with support from the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research under project PC/2010/090: Strengthening integrated crop management research in the Pacific Islands in support of sustainable intensification of high-value crop production, implemented by the University of Queensland and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community.

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