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Banana fungus increasingly resistant to fungicides

Black Sigatoka, which is caused by a leaf fungus called *Pseudocercospora fijensis*, affects banana plantations across the globe. Banana farmers use fungicides to protect their harvest but are finding they need increasing quantities. This is because the leaf mould is becoming resistant to the fungicides

This finding has been reported by Wageningen researchers in the journal *Pest Management Science*. They have made the first extensive analysis of the sensitivity of isolates (variants) of the leaf mould to three fungicides that are frequently used in banana-producing countries. Their research shows that the fungus is rapidly developing a resistance to fungicides as a result of the liberal use of these chemicals.

Research leader Gert Kema, professor of Phytopathology in Wageningen, concludes that banana producers must break the vicious circle of increased use of fungicides which is making the devastating fungus increasingly resistant. For many years, he has called for research and development of new banana breeds

resistant to Black Sigatoka and the development of alternative methods of disease control.

Resistant varieties

More bananas are eaten in the world than any other fruit. Banana plantations are dominated by the Cavendish banana, which makes up about 95 per cent of global exports. The variety is highly susceptible to Black Sigatoka, so banana plantations are sprayed with fungicides weekly. To make matters worse, some banana growers are faced with a new threat: the aggressive soil fungus that causes the Panama disease.

Kema joined a consortium last year with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and Wageningen biotech company Keygene, with the aim of developing banana varieties resistant to Panama disease. And, with the help of international funding, he launched a business to develop varieties resistant to Black Sigatoka. Kema's group has previously mapped the resistance of hundreds of wild and domestic banana varieties to fungal diseases. AS