Safe and cost effective management of the fall armyworm, *Spodoptera frugiperda* (Lepidoptera: Noctuidae) using green insecticide baits

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DOI: [https://doi.org/10.22271/chemi.2020.v8.i5b.10454](https://doi.org/10.22271/chemi.2020.v8.i5b.10454)

Abstract

The fall armyworm, *Spodoptera frugiperda* (Smith) (Lepidoptera: Noctuidae), is a new invasive species in India. This pest is occurring in serious proportions, causing significant damage to the maize crop in several states across the country. Insecticides are applied several times for managing the fall armyworm on maize, which significantly increases the cost of plant protection. In this study green chemistry molecules were directly applied to the leaf whorls in the form of poison baits, in the place of foliar sprays. Main objective of this study was to reduce the cost of plant protection by changing the method of chemical delivery and to make the produce safe for consumption by using green chemistry (slightly toxic) insecticides. Poison baits prepared using spinetoram 5 ml/kg, 2.5 ml/kg and novaluron 5 ml/kg recorded maximum larval mortality and minimized the leaf damage by fall armyworm. These insecticides contributed for 97.20, 93.15 and 92.46 per cent reduction in larval population over untreated control, respectively at 14 days after second application. Comparative efficacy of insecticide when applied as baits *vis-a-vis* foliar sprays suggested that the difference was non-significant in spinetoram, novaluron and chlorantraniliprole. There was substantial reduction in the cost of plant protection ranging from 22 to 44 per cent in bait application over foliar spray involving same insecticide. Overall, this study opens up new opportunity for reducing the cost of plant protection while managing fall armyworm on maize.

Keywords: Fall armyworm, *Spodoptera frugiperda*, Green chemistry insecticides, Poison baits

Introduction

The fall armyworm, *Spodoptera frugiperda* (Smith) (Noctuidae: Lepidoptera) is one of the very serious insect pests on variety of crops around the world. It is a polyphagous pest that causes significant losses to many agricultural crops and is reported to infest more than 353 plant species belonging to 76 families (Montezano et al., 2018) [1] *viz.*, maize, rice, sorghum, sugarcane, cabbage, beet, peanut, soybean, alfalfa, onion, tomato, potato and cotton (Pogue et al., 2002; CABI 2016) [2, 3]. Among these crops, this species is known to cause heavy yield losses in cereal crops such as maize and sorghum. In corn, yield losses due to fall armyworm damage can reach up to 32% in the United States (Wiseman and Isenhour, 1993) [4] and 45-60% in Nicaragua (Hruska and Glandstone, 1988) [5]. In Brazil, *S. frugiperda* causes up to 34% reduction in maize grain yield that amounts to an annual loss of US$ 400 million (Lima et al., 2010) [6].

The fall armyworm is native to the Americas and it is a key pest of maize (*Zea mays L.* throughout the Americas (Sparks, 1979) [7]. This pest was noticed in Nigeria in West Africa during early 2016 and in East Africa in 2017 (Abrahams et al., 2017) [8]. Subsequently, this dreaded pest was reported from India on maize crop (Ganiger et al., 2018 Sharanabasappa et al. 2018) [9, 10]. In recent times fall armyworm immigration was reported from china (Xu et al. 2019) [11].

The developing larvae eat different parts of the host plant, depending on the stage of crop and the age of the larvae. Larvae always confine to the leaf whorl portion and feed hiding in whors. Young larvae usually feed on leaves, creating a characteristic “windowing” effect and moist sawdust-like frass near the funnel. Early in the season, this feeding can kill the growing point, which prevents cob formation.
In older plants the larger larvae can bore into the developing maize cobs, reducing yield quantity and quality. This pest has a migratory behaviour with a high dispersal capacity that allows the pest to quickly spread along the range of its host plants.

Among the several options, management of fall armyworm largely revolve around application insecticides, particularly in the countries where fall armyworm has been reported during recent times. As this pest species occurs on young plants and persists through the entire crop period completing several generations, it warrants application of chemicals multiple times. Hence, it results in substantial increase in cost incurred on insecticides. Further, large scale use of extremely & highly hazardous insecticides on fall armyworm pose serious risk on animals (when used as fodder) and human beings. In this investigation, we attempted to reduce the quantity of insecticides used per unit area by modifying method delivery of chemicals using green chemistry insecticides. Instead of spraying we tried to deliver the chemicals in the form of poison bait directly into the whorl portion where fall armyworm larvae live and feed. Here, we primarily focussed on reducing the cost of plant protection and keeping crop safe for consumption.

Materials and Methods

In this study three different experiments were conducted a) Preliminary laboratory assessment of efficacy of green chemistry insecticides on fall armyworm when used as poison baits b) assessment of efficacy of poison baits on fall armyworm in the field c) comparison of efficacy of chemicals used as poison baits vis-a-vis sprays

Initially, efficacy of green chemistry molecules on fall armyworm was assessed through bioassays and bait feeding studies in the laboratory. Here, insecticides were mixed with the bait material and laboratory reared larvae were allowed to feed on the bait. Later, chemicals that were found effective in the laboratory were chosen for field studies. The quantity of bait required per plant was also estimated through preliminary field experiments.

The field experiments with regard to assessing the efficacy of green chemistry molecules as poison baits and foliar sprays was conducted during *Rabi* 2018 on maize crop (sweet corn). Four green chemistry insecticides viz., spinetoram 11.7 SC, chlorantraniliprole 18.5 SC, novaluron 10 EC, azadirachtin 1% that were found promising in the laboratory assessment were assessed along with emamectin benzoate 5 SG (most commonly used insecticide on fall armyworm in India) and thiodicarb 75 WP as standard check. Spinetoram, chlorantraniliprole and novaluron were assessed at two different doses with highest concentration @ 10 X of the dose used for sprays and lowest concentration was half of this. As azadirachtin and emamectin benzoate were not found effective at lower concentrations in the laboratory experiments, these chemicals were assessed only at highest concentration (Table 1). The experiment was conducted in randomized block design (RBD) and every treatment was replicated thrice.

The bait was prepared by mixing rice bran in 10% jaggery and the mixture was allowed to ferment overnight. Next day, prior to the application, the insecticides were mixed with bait material and applied in the whorls of fall armyworm infested maize plants @ 1 gram per plant. In the control plots, bait material without insecticide was applied to the plant whorls.

The treatments were imposed twice: first application was on 20 days old maize crop followed by second application after 15 days of first application. Simultaneously, these insecticides were also assessed as foliar sprays at recommended doses. The observation on number of larvae per plant was recorded prior to the application of the bait. After the application of baits, larval mortality was recorded at seven days and fourteen days after each application. In addition to larval mortality, the leaf damage was also recorded based on visual scoring as described by Davis and Williams (1992)\(^{[12]}\). The observations were recorded on ten randomly selected plants in each replication.

Grain yield per plot was recorded at harvest. Reduction in pest population and leaf area damage over untreated control was calculated by using formula suggested by Henderson and Tilton (1955). The data on larval population was subjected to square root transformation and data on per cent leaf damage was subjected to arcsine transformation. Later, transformed values were analysed using ANOVA.

### Table 1: Treatment details

| Treatment number | Treatment detail                                   |
|------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| T1               | Poison bait with spinetoram 11.7 SC @ 5 ml per kg of bait |
| T2               | Poison bait with spinetoram 11.7 SC @ 2.5 ml per kg of bait |
| T3               | Poison bait with chlorantraniliprole 18.5 SC @ 3 ml per kg of bait |
| T4               | Poison bait with chlorantraniliprole 18.5 SC @ 1.5 ml per kg of bait |
| T5               | Poison bait with novaluron 10 EC @ 5 ml per kg of bait |
| T6               | Poison bait with novaluron 10 EC @ 2.5 ml per kg of bait |
| T7               | Poison bait with azadirachtin 10000 ppm @ 10 ml per kg of bait |
| T8               | Poison bait with thiodicarb 75 WP @ 10 g per kg of bait |
| T9               | Poison bait with emamectin benzoate 5 SG @ 4 grams per kg of bait |
| T10              | Untreated control                                  |

Result and Discussion

Pre-treatment pest population ranged from 1.30 to 1.50 larvae per plant across the plots and were statistically non-significant, indicating uniformity of pest population in the experimental plot.

After the application of baits, there was substantial reduction in larval populations in all the treatments compared to untreated control. Lowest larval population was recorded in spinetoram, chlorantraniliprole and novaluron treated plots followed by emamectin benzoate, thiodicarb and azadirachtin treated plants.

Fourteen days after first application the mean larval population per plant in treated plants ranged from 0.22 to 0.50 as compared to 1.73 in untreated control. The spinetoram 11.7 SC @ 5 ml/kg, 2.5 ml/kg, novaluron 10 EC @ 5 ml/kg and standard check thiodicarb 75 WP 10 g/kg recorded 86.35, 83.73, 80.68 and 82.06 per cent reduction in larval population over untreated control, respectively after first time application.
of poison bait. This clearly indicates that poison baits are effective in reducing the larval populations of the fall armyworm.

It was noticed that the mean larval population reduced further significantly after the second application of poison bait. In the treated plots mean larval population per plant ranged from 0.03 to 0.30 as compared to 1.05 in untreated control. Insecticides viz., spinetoram 11.7 SC @ 5 ml/kg, 2.5 ml/kg and novaluron 10 EC @ 5 ml/kg provided 97.20%, 93.15% and 92.46% reduction in larval population over the untreated control, respectively. This was followed by chlorantraniliprole 18.5 SC @ 3 ml/kg, 1.5 ml/kg, novaluron 10 EC @ 2.5 ml/kg, azadirachtin 1% 10 ml/kg and emamectin benzoate 5 SG 4 g/ha which recorded 70.63 to 87.37 per cent reduction in larval population over untreated control.

In addition to larval mortality, leaf damage (%) caused by fall armyworm larvae was also recorded. Leaf damage varied from 55.67 to 60.33 per cent across the plots before the imposition of treatments and was uniform across the plots. Damage on leaves caused by the fall armyworm was significantly reduced fourteen days after first application in treated plants and it ranged from 2.83 to 25.33% as compared to 52.50% in control. The spinetoram 11.7 SC @ 5 ml/kg, 2.5 ml/kg, chlorantraniliprole 18.5 SC @ 3 ml/kg and novaluron 10 EC @ 5 ml/kg recorded 74.71, 71.58, 70.15 and 73.01% reduction in leaf damage over untreated control, respectively. The leaf damage by fall armyworm larvae reduced further (5.50 to 20.83%) after the second application of poison bait. The spinetoram 11.7 SC @ 5 ml/kg, 2.5 ml/kg, chlorantraniliprole 18.5 SC @ 3 ml/kg and novaluron 10 EC @ 5 ml/kg, 2.5 ml/kg recorded 89.09, 83.36, 81.79, 85.62 and 80.94 per cent reduction in leaf damage over untreated control and were found better than the other treatments.

The grain yield of maize crop in the experimental plots varied from 20.60 to 33.83 q/ha. The maximum yield (33.83 q/ha) was recorded in spinetoram 11.7 SC @ 5 ml/kg treated plot. The spinetoram 11.7 SC @ 2.5 ml/kg, chlorantraniliprole 18.5 SC @ 3 ml/kg, 1.5 ml/kg, novaluron 10 EC @ 5 ml/kg, 2.5 ml/kg, azadirachtin 1% 10 ml/kg, emamectin benzoate 5 SG 4 g/kg and a standard check thiodicarb 75 WP 10 g/kg recorded yield variation from 24.77 to 32.67 q/ha and found superior than untreated control (20.60 q/ha).

We compared the efficacy of insecticides used as poison bait vis-a-vis foliar spray using same chemical in reducing damage caused by fall armyworm. The results suggested that bait application was as effective as foliar sprays involving same insecticide. The difference in effectiveness of chemical as bait & spray application was non-significant in insecticides viz., spinetoram 11.7 SC, chlorantraniliprole 18.5 SC, novaluron 10 EC and thiodicarb 75 WP. However, in case of azadirachtin, bait application was more effective than foliar spray and contrasting result was noticed with emamectin benzoate where spray gave superior protection over bait application.

Cost of plant protection when insecticides were used as foliar spray and poison baits was calculated by factoring cost of insecticides and labour requirement in both the methods of application. Later, per cent increase or decrease in cost of bait application per acre over foliar sprays was calculated. It was found that the cost of plant protection as bait application was substantially lower than the foliar sprays with chemicals viz., spinetoram 11.7 SC, chlorantraniliprole 18.5 SC and thiodicarb 75 WP (42 to 44.78% reduction in cost over sprays). In case of emamectin benzoate bait application was found expensive than foliar spray. Main contributing factor for decrease in cost of plant protection in bait was reduction in quantity of insecticides required compared to foliar sprays.

As new generation molecules are relatively more expensive, reduction in quantity of insecticides required directly translated into overall reduction in cost of protection.

For managing fall armyworm, insecticides are applied as foliar sprays. This species is relatively difficult to manage and necessitates multiple sprays which subsequently increases the cost of plant protection. As this pest is confined to whorl region of the plant, we explored the possibility of applying insecticides as baits in the whorl to reduce the cost. Hitherto, only thiodicarb was used in most of the insect baits on caterpillars and it is a highly toxic chemical. In this study we found that greener molecules with pre-harvest interval (PHI) of < 5 days were very effective as baits. Further, the cost of plant protection was significantly low when these insecticides were used as baits (up to 45% cost reduction). Though, poison baits are effective, it is relatively tedious to apply it in the plant whorls.

Designing & developing a bait applicator will have profound influence on popularization of insecticide application as baits in maize crop against fall armyworm. These findings provide new cost effective and safer options for management of the fall armyworm, S. frugiperda. As molecules assessed and found effective in this study belong to different chemical groups, rotating these chemicals as one of the components of integrated pest management schedules would go a long way in delaying the development of resistance against these chemicals.

### Table 2: Efficacy of insecticides applied as poison baits on larval populations of Spodoptera frugiperda in maize

| Treatments | Number of larvae per plant (average of 10 plants) | Percent reduction over control |
|------------|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
|            | Pre-treatment population | 1st application of bait | 2nd application of bait | After 1st application of bait | After 2nd application of bait |
|            | 7 DAT | 14 DAT | Mean | 7 DAT | 14 DAT | Mean | 7 DAT | 14 DAT | Mean | 7 DAT | 14 DAT | Mean |
| Spinetoram 11.7 SC @ 5 ml/kg of bait | 1.50 (1.41) | 0.27 (0.88) | 0.17 (0.82) | 0.22 | 0.07 (0.75) | 0.00 (0.71) | 0.03 | 86.35 | 97.2 |
| Spinetoram 11.7 SC @ 2.5 ml/kg bait | 1.43 (1.39) | 0.30 (0.89) | 0.20 (0.84) | 0.25 | 0.10 (0.77) | 0.03 (0.73) | 0.07 | 83.73 | 93.15 |
| Chlorantraniliprole 18.5 SC @ 3 ml/kg bait | 1.33 (1.35) | 0.30 (0.89) | 0.33 (0.91) | 0.32 | 0.20 (0.84) | 0.03 (0.73) | 0.12 | 77.61 | 87.37 |
| Chlorantraniliprole 18.5 SC @ 1.5 ml/kg bait | 1.37 (1.37) | 0.33 (0.91) | 0.40 (0.95) | 0.37 | 0.30 (0.89) | 0.10 (0.77) | 0.20 | 74.87 | 79.56 |
| Novaluron 10 EC @ 5 ml/kg bait | 1.30 (1.34) | 0.27 (0.88) | 0.27 (0.88) | 0.27 | 0.13 (0.80) | 0.00 (0.71) | 0.07 | 80.68 | 92.46 |
| Novaluron 10 EC @ 2.5 ml/kg bait | 1.37 (1.37) | 0.27 (0.88) | 0.33 (0.91) | 0.30 | 0.17 (0.82) | 0.10 (0.77) | 0.13 | 79.63 | 86.72 |
| Azadirachtin 1% @ 10 ml/kg bait | 1.43 (1.39) | 0.43 (0.97) | 0.57 (1.03) | 0.50 | 0.40 (0.95) | 0.20 (0.84) | 0.30 | 67.47 | 70.63 |
| Emamectin benzoate 5 SG @ 4 g/kg bait | 1.40 (1.38) | 0.30 (0.89) | 0.23 (0.86) | 0.27 | 0.33 (0.80) | 0.20 (0.77) | 0.27 | 68.77 | 73 |
| Thiodicarb 75 WP @ 10 g/kg bait | 1.40 (1.38) | 0.40 (0.95) | 0.53 (1.02) | 0.47 | 0.13 (0.91) | 0.10 (0.84) | 0.12 | 82.06 | 88 |
| Untreated control | 1.47 (1.40) | 1.73 (1.49) | 1.43 (1.39) | 1.58 | 1.10 (1.26) | 1.00 (1.22) | 1.05 |
| S. Em (±) | 0.02 | 0.02 | 0.02 | - | 0.01 | 0.01 | - |
| CD (p=0.05) | 0.07 | 0.05 | 0.05 | - | 0.04 | 0.03 | - |
| CV (%) | 3.01 | 3.10 | 2.75 | - | 2.82 | 2.21 | - |
Table 3: Efficacy of insecticides applied as poison baits on leaf damage caused by Spodoptera frugiperda in maize

| Treatments                  | Per cent leaf damage on plants (average of 10 plants) | Percent reduction over control |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
|                             | I Spray 7 DAT | I Spray 14 DAT | II Spray 7 DAT | II Spray 14 DAT | 1st application  | 2nd application  |
| Spinetoram 11.7 SC @ 5 ml/kg of bait | 57.33 (0.86) | 13.00 (0.37) | 12.83 | 6.67 (0.26) | 4.33 (0.21) | 5.50 | 74.71 | 89.09 |
| Spinetoram 11.7 SC @ 5 ml/kg of bait | 60.33 (0.89) | 16.33 (0.42) | 14.00 (0.38) | 15.17 | 9.33 (0.31) | 8.33 (0.29) | 8.83 | 71.58 | 83.36 |
| Chlorantraniliprole 18.5 SC @ 3 ml/kg of bait | 59.33 (0.88) | 17.33 (0.43) | 14.00 (0.38) | 15.67 | 10.33 (0.33) | 8.67 (0.30) | 9.50 | 70.15 | 81.79 |
| Chlorantraniliprole 18.5 SC @ 1.5 ml/kg of bait | 58.00 (0.87) | 19.33 (0.46) | 16.33 (0.42) | 17.83 | 12.67 (0.36) | 10.67 (0.33) | 11.67 | 65.26 | 77.12 |
| Novaluron 10 EC @ 5 ml/kg of bait | 59.33 (0.88) | 15.00 (0.40) | 13.33 (0.37) | 14.17 | 8.67 (0.30) | 6.33 (0.25) | 7.50 | 73.01 | 85.62 |
| Novaluron 10 EC @ 2.5 ml/kg of bait | 55.67 (0.84) | 18.67 (0.45) | 15.53 (0.40) | 17.00 | 10.33 (0.33) | 8.33 (0.29) | 9.33 | 65.49 | 80.94 |
| Azadirachtin 1% @ 10 ml/kg of bait | 57.00 (0.86) | 24.67 (0.52) | 20.00 (0.45) | 25.33 | 21.00 (0.46) | 20.67 (0.47) | 20.83 | 49.78 | 58.44 |
| Emamectin benzoate 5 SG @ 4 g/kg of bait | 56.33 (0.86) | 23.33 (0.45) | 23.67 (0.46) | 23.50 | 18.00 (0.36) | 15.67 (0.34) | 16.83 | 62.43 | 76.67 |
| Thiodicarb 75 WP @ 10 g/kg of bait | 57.67 (0.85) | 19.00 (0.50) | 19.33 (0.51) | 19.17 | 12.13 (0.44) | 11.33 (0.41) | 11.83 | 52.85 | 66.02 |
| Untreated control | 59.33 (0.88) | 19.00 (0.50) | 19.33 (0.51) | 19.17 | 12.13 (0.44) | 11.33 (0.41) | 11.83 | 52.85 | 66.02 |

Table 4: Effect of application of insecticide baits on maize grain yield

| Treatments                  | Yield (q/ha) |
|-----------------------------|--------------|
| Spinetoram 11.7 SC @ 5 ml/kg of bait | 33.83 |
| Spinetoram 11.7 SC @ 2.5 ml/kg of bait | 31.58 |
| Chlorantraniliprole 18.5 SC @ 3 ml/kg of bait | 31.33 |
| Chlorantraniliprole 18.5 SC @ 1.5 ml/kg of bait | 29.75 |
| Novaluron 10 EC @ 5 ml/kg of bait of bait | 32.67 |
| Novaluron 10 EC @ 2.5 ml/kg of bait | 31.33 |
| Azadirachtin 1% @ 10 ml/kg of bait | 24.77 |
| Emamectin benzoate 5 SG @ 4 g/kg of bait | 32.47 |
| Thiodicarb 75 WP @ 10 g/kg of bait | 26.67 |
| Untreated control | 20.60 |

Table 5: Comparison of efficacy of insecticides applied as foliar spray and poison baits

| Insecticide                  | Insecticide dose | Per cent reduction in larval population over control | Paired ‘t’ test |
|------------------------------|------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|----------------|
| Spinetoram 11.7 SC          | Spray 0.6 ml or g per litre | Bait 3 ml or g per kg | 94.19 | 86.19 | NS (P=0.33) |
| Chlorantraniliprole 18.5 EC | Spray 0.4 ml or g per litre | Bait 2 ml or g per kg | 88.38 | 72.06 | NS (P=0.08) |
| Novaluron 10 EC             | Spray 1 ml or g per litre | Bait 3 ml or g per kg | 87.52 | 79.04 | NS (P=0.20) |
| Azadirachtin 1%             | Spray 2 ml or g per litre | Bait 10 ml or g per kg | 32.67 | 60.47 | NS (P=0.04) |
| Emamectin benzoate 5 SG     | Spray 0.4 ml or g per litre | Bait 10 ml or g per kg | 90.86 | 62.70 | ** (P<0.01) |
| Thiodicarb 75 WP            | Spray 2 ml or g per litre | Bait 10 ml or g per kg | 81.71 | 83.80 | NS (P=0.20) |

Table 6: Reduction in cost of plant protection when insecticides were used as baits over sprays for management of S. frugiperda on maize

| Insecticides                  | Per cent reduction in cost (INR) |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Spinetoram 11.7 SC           | 44.78                             |
| Chlorantraniliprole 18.5 SC  | 44.40                             |
| Novaluron 10 EC              | 24.00                             |
| Azadirachtin 1%              | 20.00                             |
| Emamectin benzoate 5 SG      | -32.00                            |
| Thiodicarb 70 WP             | 42.66                             |

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