Plant Protection Service
Secretariat of the Pacific Community

Pest Alert

No. 31 **ISSN 1727- 8473** **May 2003**

Papaya Mealybug, *Paracoccus marginatus,* in Palau

The first record of Papaya Mealybug in Palau was made in March 2003 by Dr. Joel Miles, Palau Community College. Samples collected by Konrad Englberger, SPC Plant Protection Micronesia, were identified on March 30th, 2003, by Dr. Gillian Watson as *Paracoccus marginatus*.

In the Pacific the Papaya Mealybug was first reported from Guam in April 2002. It was first described from specimens collected on *Manihot esculenta* in Mexico, and is probably native to Central America. The pest is widespread in the Caribbean and is recorded in Antigua, Belize, Cayman Is., Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Guadeloupe, Guatemala, Haiti, Virgin Islands, Bahamas, St.Kitts and Nevis, St.Barthelemy, Puerto Rico, Monserrat, Curacao, and Florida (USA).

Paracoccus marginatus infests *Carica papaya* and has more than 50 other hosts, including: *Acacia species*, cassava, beans, eggplant gourds, hibiscus, plumeria, pumpkin, pepper, sweet potato, tomato, citrus, mango and soursop.

The species is distinctive in that it turns yellow when first placed in alcohol then turns black in 24 – 48 hours in the absence of any heat.

On papaya plants the mealybug infests the young leaves and fruits, and mostly along the veins and midrib of the older leaves. Young leaves will become crinkly and older leaves will turn yellow and dry up prematurely. Terminal shoots become bunchy and distorted. Affected trees will start to drop flowers and young fruits.

On plumeria, the leaves and flowers curl up and the new shoots on hibiscus become scorched. Honeydew produced by the mealybug will turn into a thick sooty mold growth on all affected plants.

Ban all movement of planting material from areas infested with the Papaya Mealybug. Use an effective quarantine treatment such as fumigation or insecticide dip if it is necessary to move planting material.

Close-up of Papaya Mealybug clusters (l) and young papaya fruits heavily infested with Papaya Mealybug (r)

For general information on plant protection, contact SPC Plant Protection Micronesia; Phone: (691) 320 7523, e-mail: ppmicronesia@mail.fm; for biological control contact Dr. Muniappan, UOG, e-mail: rmuni@uog9.uog.edu; in Palau, contact Agriculture Department, phone: (680) 488 1517 or 488 2504. Photos supplied by Dr. Joel Miles.

Communications of pest and disease incidents of interest to the Pacific region should be sent to: Plant Protection Service, Secretariat of the Pacific Community, Private Mail Bag, Suva, Fiji Islands. Tel: (+679) 3370 733; Fax: (+679) 3386 326; email: pps@spc.int