

MPUMALANGA EXTENSION MATTERS

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RATOON STUNT ALERT!

There is an increase in the number of fields testing positive for ratoon stunt (RSD) in the Lowveld. See Figure 1 below.

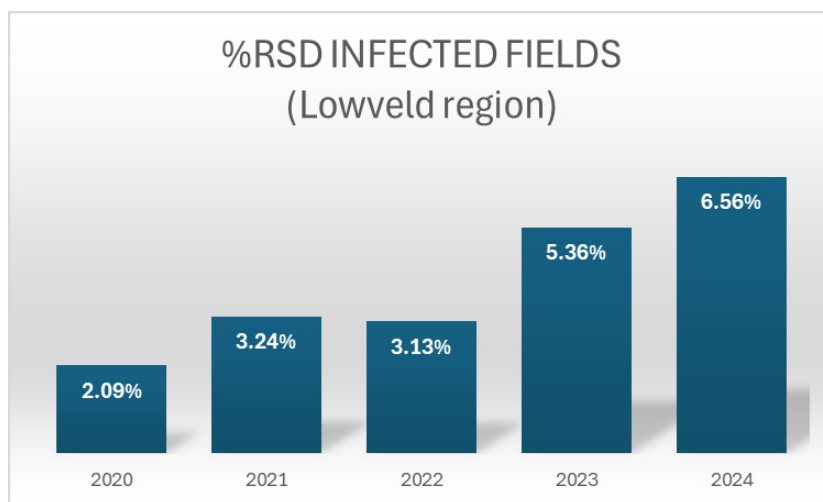


Figure 1: RSD infected fields.

How does RSD spread?

RSD primarily spreads through planting infected seedcane, survival of infected volunteer plants, and transmission on contaminated equipment like cane knives and mechanical harvesters.

Why is RSD a concern?

As a bacterial infection, ratoon stunt (RSD) restricts the flow in the xylem vessels. Because RSD spreads through harvesting equipment, more stools become infected with each harvest. Therefore, yield losses increase with each successive ratoon (see Figure 2). Losses are most severe when the cane experiences stress.

GUIDELINES FOR RESTRICTING THE SPREAD OF RSD

The best defence against RSD is to keep your farm RSD-free. It's also crucial to contain any RSD infections within your farm to prevent regional spread, especially within a cutting group. If RSD is detected in a field on your farm, please inform the other members of your cutting group.

On farm operations that will curb the spread of RSD include:

- **Knowing the RSD status of your fields** by requesting a survey (call the Biosecurity office at 066 257 3926).
- **Ensuring the complete eradication of the old crop** before replanting a field, especially if it previously tested positive for RSD. Allow a cane-free period to confirm no volunteer regrowth; the duration depends on the effectiveness of crop eradication.
- **Planting only healthy seedcane** (use certified or approved seedcane). A Seedcane Committee and transplant nurseries are in place, and additional hot water treatment (HWT) tanks are being manufactured in line with the industry's Seedcane Vision 2028.
- **Maintaining field hygiene** during both planting and harvesting by thoroughly disinfecting all sugarcane farming tools and equipment.

For more information on RSD, refer to [SASRI Information Sheet 9.1](#)



Figure 2: Healthy cane (left) compared to RSD infected cane (right).