

ENVIRONMENT

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French agency warns of virus threatening tomatoes, peppers

FILE PHOTO: A tomato plant is seen in a planter box on the 700 square metre (7500 square feet) rooftop of the Bon Marche, where the store's employees grow some 60 kinds of fruits zucchinis, mint and other herbs in their urban garden with a view of the capital in Paris, France, August 26, 2016. REUTERS/Regis Duvignau/

PARIS (Reuters) - A particularly devastating virus is threatening tomatoes, peppers and chilli plants in France after affecting six countries in Europe, United States and China, France's food safety agency Anses said on Tuesday.

The Tomato brown rugose fruit virus (ToBRFV) is harmless to humans but it can destroy a whole areas of production, be it in greenhouses, veg fields, it said.

It can be transmitted by infected seeds, plants and fruits, as well as by simple contact and survive for a long time without losing its power of infection.

There is currently no treatment or variety resistant to the virus, which emerged in the Middle East in 2014 before spreading to Europe in 2018.

“Anses confirms a high risk of introduction and spread of the virus in France with a significant potential impact on crops, both for professional production, which represent significant volumes,” it said in a statement.

The virus causes yellow or brown spots to appear on the leaves and deformation of fruit, which thus become non-marketable, Anses said.

The agency recommends that plants in a contaminated area be removed and burned.

It also advises growers to buy only certified seeds and if possible outside contaminated European countries.

Reporting by Sybille de La Hamaide; editing by David Evans

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