

## Farmer Fact Sheet 30: Taro Beetles



### What are they?

They are large insects that live in the soil and feed on taro. They also feed on other plants, including banana, coconuts, forest ferns, giant taro, giant swamp taro, *Pandanus*, sugarcane and young oil palms. The scientific name is *Papuana*. There are many species.

### What damage do they do?

The adult beetles do the damage. They burrow into the corms of taro, killing plants when they reach the growing point. Those that survive grow poorly. Holes bored in the corms make them unfit for export, local markets and even home use (photo, left).

### How do I identify them?

The adult is a shiny black beetle, 15-25 mm long, with horns on the head (photo, right). The number and size of the horns differ among species. Check breeding sites under rotten logs/stumps, manure, sawdust, along riverbanks, and in the fibrous roots of grasses. Grubs are white and “C” shaped at rest. When mature, they are 25-40 mm long. Look for young plants that are wilting; pull them up and check for beetles.

### How do I manage taro beetles?

Several natural enemies have been found, including a fungus, a fly and the cane toad, but none give good control. *Papuana* beetles are very difficult to control.

#### Cultural control:

- Crop rotation, clean planting material (free from soil, grubs and beetles);
- Destroy breeding sites at the sides of taro gardens.

#### Biological control:

- The fungus, *Metarhizium*, works under experimental conditions, but as yet there is no recommendation for farmers. A virus has been tried without success.

#### Chemical control:

The chemical imidachloprid (Confidor) and cypermethrin (Mustang) have controlled *Papuana* beetles in Fiji, and also in Solomon Islands. See your MAL extension officer. **READ THE LABEL BEFORE APPLYING THE INSECTIDE.**