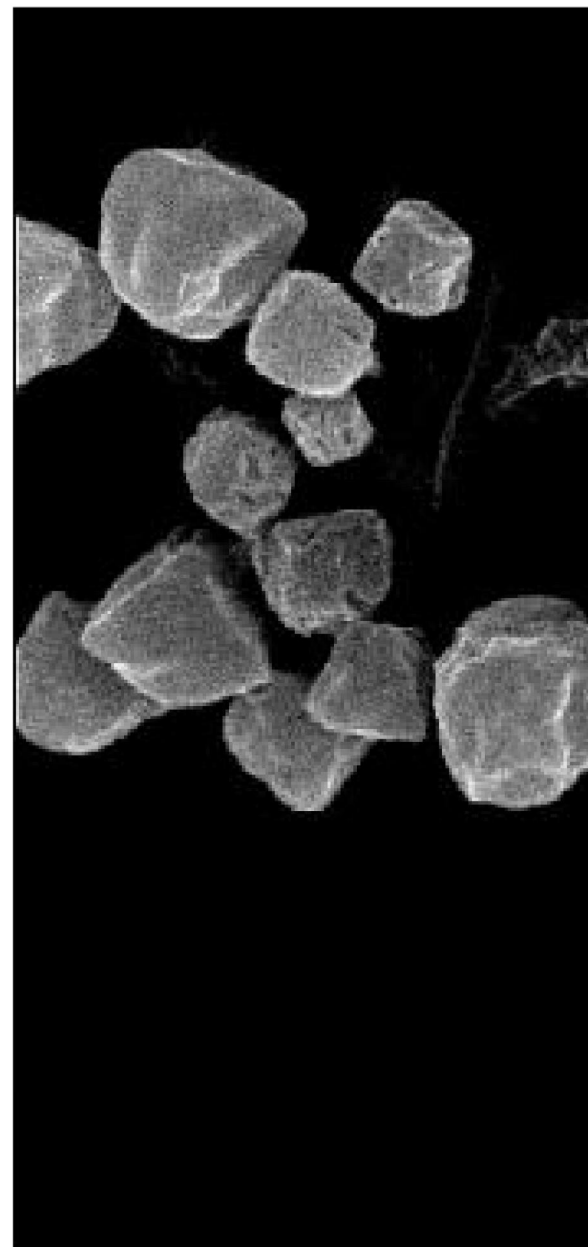
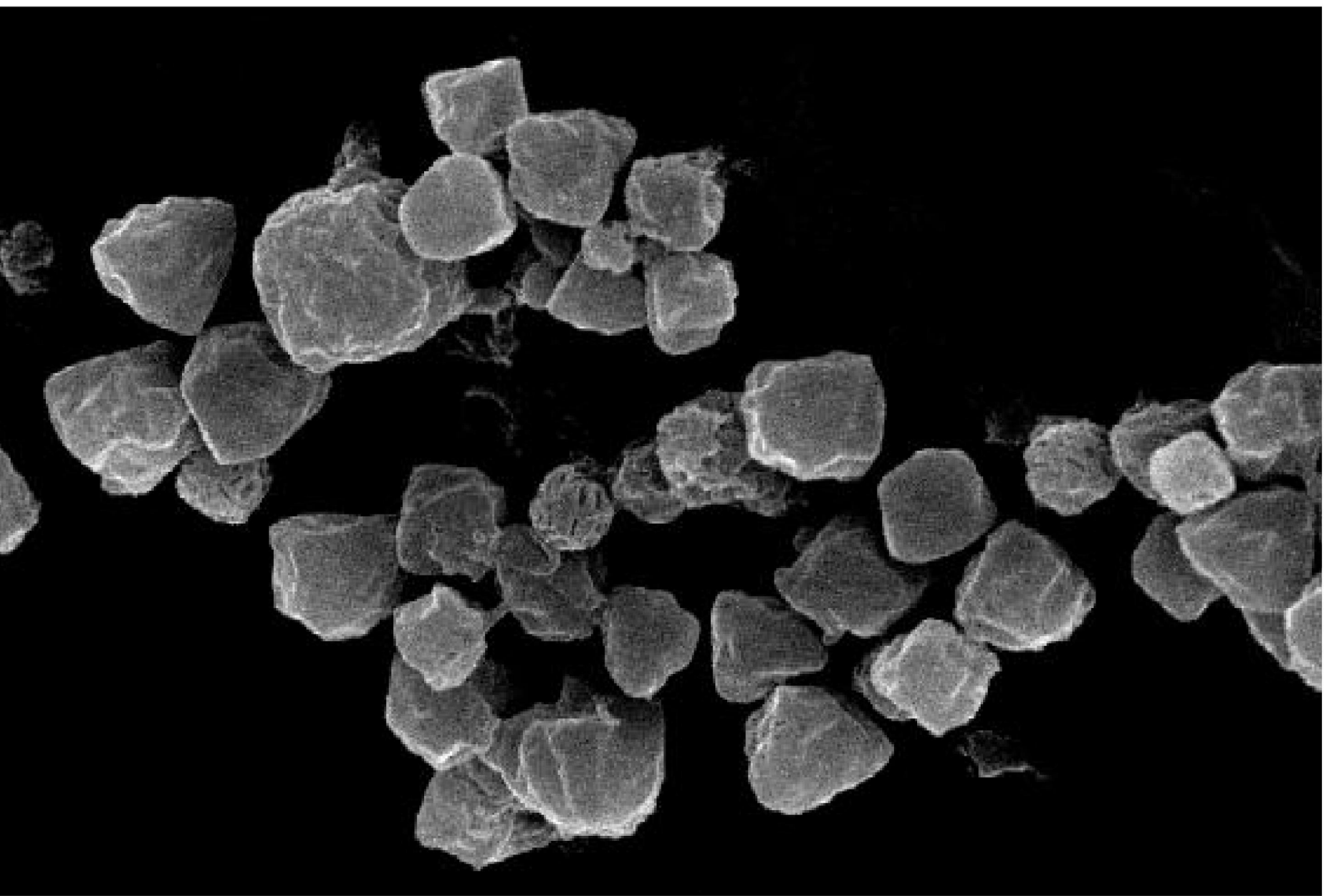


Crystals of Salt

Lau Wei Hong





The notorious armyworm is one of the most destructive leaf-feeding insect pests worldwide, which can defoliate many economically important crops. As suggested by its name, they emerge like a troop of army and can skeletonize the entire crop overnight. They burrow into the soil and form pupae. As the saying goes, every living creature has its own natural enemies. A close observation on armyworm dying naturally in the field may give us a clue to a solution to end the disaster brought by this notorious insect pest. When ingested, liquid from the dead armyworms were found able to kill other armyworms with similar conditions. Cells of dead armyworms show foreign bodies which do not exist in the healthy armyworm. Cross sections of the armyworm reveal these foreign bodies can actually reproduce. Once inside the body of the armyworm, they take control of the host cells and produce their own genetic materials. The green armyworms turn pinkish. Before they die, millions of the foreign bodies will burst out from the cells and be released into the environment, awaiting other insects to come in contact and become infected in turn. Through extensive studies on the foreign bodies, the cause of the death of the armyworm was known to be due to *Spodoptera litura* Fabricius nucleopolyhedrovirus, a naturally occurring virus that infects insects. A virus that looks like crystals of salt. The truth is finally revealed.

