

Wasps Can Control Alfalfa Weevil

Alfalfa weevils declined about 90 per cent during a three-year survey of selected areas in which U.S. Department of Agriculture entomologists released wasps to control the pests, thereby saving farmers in these areas more than \$600,000, in 1969.

These results are as good as farmers obtain with conventional insecticides, and pose no food or environmental hazards involving residues.

Results with the wasps, which are harmless to man, are the most successful of any biological control experiments conducted by USDA's Agricultural Research Service.

Dr. William H. Day, an ARS entomologist stationed at Moorestown, N.J., calculated that the wasps saved farmers about \$5 per acre—for insecticides, labor, and equipment that would have been needed to control alfalfa weevils. Dr. Day and ARS entomologist Roger W. Fuester surveyed three test areas in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, comprising 155,000 acres of alfalfa.

Statistical data that they obtained in the last three years substantiated the effectiveness of the wasps in unsprayed fields in which they had become established. In the first year, Dr. Day and Fuester captured about 40 weevil larvae per sweep of their nets, in field surveys. Of these, only nine per cent were parasitized. This and subsequent surveys were made at peak infestation periods of the year.

In the second and third years, the wasps made significant inroads on the weevils. Consequently, in the most recent survey, the entomologists captured only about five larvae per sweep. And, of these, 39 per cent were parasitized.

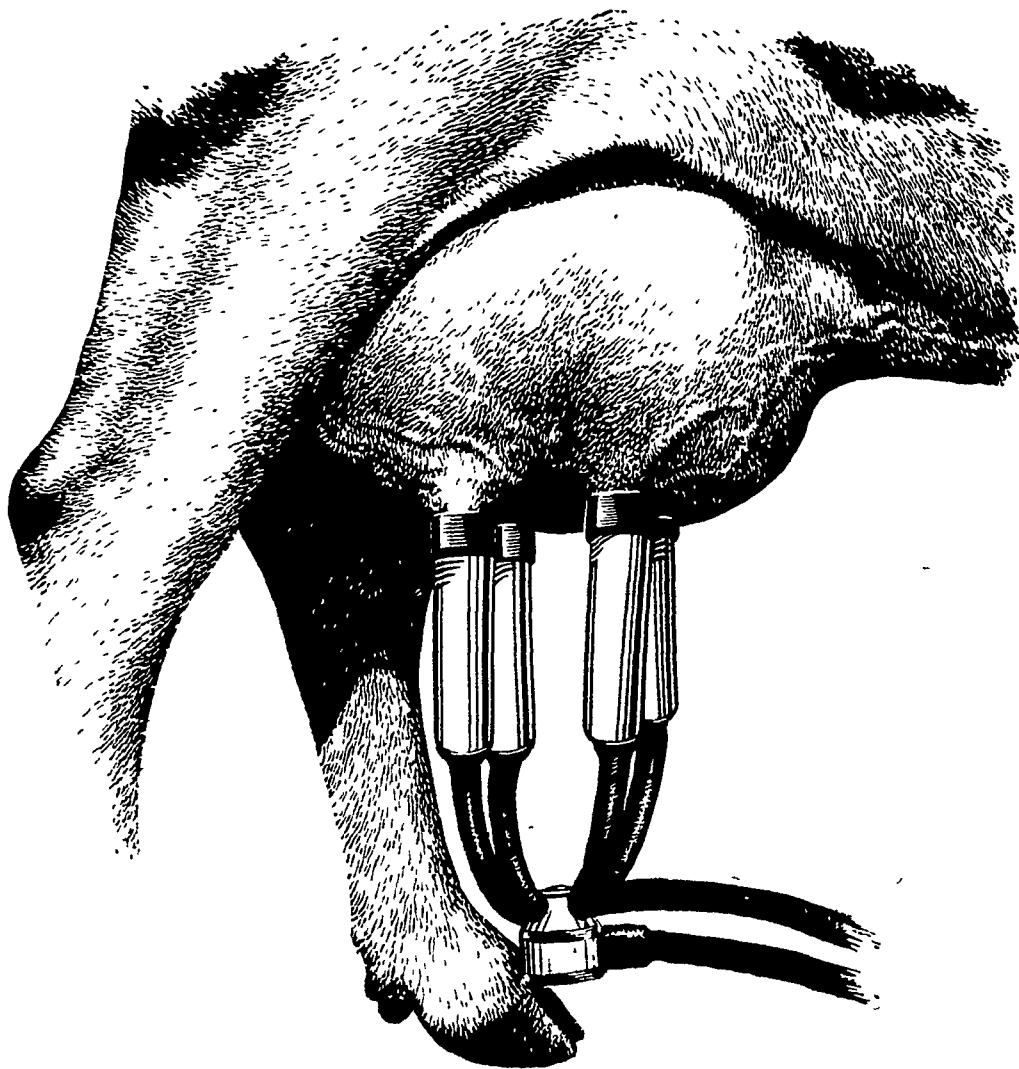
Other natural environmental factors also helped hold down infestations, but the wasps represented the last straw that broke the weevils' threat to alfalfa crops in the test areas.

Previous studies indicated that the pests do not cause sufficient damage to justify the expense of spraying if less than 15 larvae are captured per sweep with a net.

The parasitic wasps have become established in about a dozen Eastern States, and experimental release of the parasites are being made in other States.

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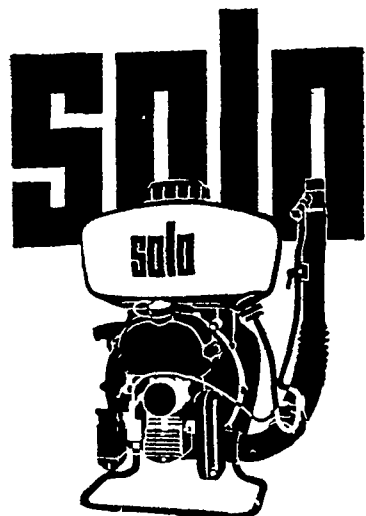
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