

Cereal leaf battle to start biological controls to be used

HARRISBURG - The Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture is cooperating with the U.S. Department of Agriculture in a biological control experiment aimed at eliminating the cereal leaf beetle, beginning June 16.

Agriculture Secretary Raymond J. Kerstetter said employes in the Department's Bureau of Plant Industry will be working with federal officials in distributing parasites of the leaf beetle on farms in 36

counties throughout the Commonwealth.

"The beetle is capable of inflicting hundreds of thousands of dollars damage to Pennsylvania's oat and wheat crops," said Kerstetter. "If biological controls can prove effective, farmers could have the benefit of an economical and environmentally safe deterrent to the leaf beetle."

The beetle, a European-Asian pest, was first identified in the United States in 1962 in Michigan. The pest spread via the prevailing winds to the eastern states.

Both adults and larvae of the beetle damage wheat, oats, barley and other small grain crops. They feed on leaves, chewing out long strips between the veins.

Henry Nixon, director of the department's Bureau of Plant Industry, explained that an economic feature of biological control is that the program does not have to be repeated yearly.

On June 16, federal and state scientists will collect cereal leaf beetle parasites at an insectary on the grounds of the Pennsylvania Game Commission,

Pymatuning Wildlife Refuge, Crawford County. The parasites will be flown to airports around the state where county agents and bureau employes will pick them up and release them in fields infested with the cereal leaf beetle.

The parasites are tiny wasps originally imported from Europe. Species of the parasite that have proved successful are *Diaparsis*, *Tetrastichus julis* and *Lemophagus curtus*. When released, the parasites seek out the cereal leaf beetle eggs or larvae and lay their own eggs inside. When the parasite egg hatches, the young eats its way out of the cereal leaf beetle, destroying it.

In Europe, the wasps are part of the natural environment and the cereal leaf beetle has not posed a problem. The wasps are harmless to humans.

Counties in which farms are to be treated are:

Bedford, Berks, Blair, Bradford, Cambria, Centre, Clearfield, Clinton, Columbia, Crawford, Cumberland, Dauphin, Elk, Franklin, Fulton, Huntingdon, Juniata and Lancaster.

Also, Lebanon, Lehigh, Lycoming, Mifflin, Montour, Northampton, Northumberland, Perry, Potter, Schuylkill, Snyder, Somerset, Sullivan, Susquehanna, Tioga, Union, Wyoming and York.

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