

Leaf beetle stung

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before the program really becomes effective, the county agent explains.

Now in its second year, the cereal leaf beetle battle was taken to farms in the New Holland, Lititz and Quarryville areas this year. Although oats is the favorite crop of the destructive larvae, it's also known to infest wheat. Lancaster

County has an estimated 3500 acres of oats this year, and 33,000 of wheat.

Lueck says the imported European wasp, which is one of the smallest wasps known, is harmless to everything except the cereal leaf beetle. It's introduced into fields as an egg inside its host - the cereal leaf beetle. The wasps themselves aren't handled anywhere except at insectaries and laboratories.

They do not sting.

The wasps attack beetle larvae and lay their own eggs inside the host. When the parasite eggs hatch, the young wasps eat their way out and destroy the cereal leaf beetle in the process.

The cereal leaf beetle feeds on the chlorophyll containing cells of the plant. A tell-tale sign of possible infestation is that the foliage has white areas. The adult cereal leaf beetle is about three-sixteenth of an inch long and its wing covers and head are a metallic bluish black. The legs and front segment of the thorax are reddish. The eggs are less than one-sixteenth of an inch long and yellowish in color when first laid. Later they darken to near black before hatching.

The beetle pest was first discovered in the United States in 1962. Since then it has spread eastward from Michigan. It arrived in Pennsylvania five years later and has now spread throughout the entire state, causing more noticeable damage each year. Until the cereal leaf beetle's parasite, the wasp, was introduced, crop losses were rated as moderately high. The United States Department of Agriculture, in cooperation with state agencies, has been working in various parts of the country to destroy the beetle. (See related story on page 99 of this week's Lancaster Farming.)

The ultimate goal in the

project is to have the wasps established in all the areas where the cereal leaf beetle has done some damage. The parasitic insect will then naturally destroy the pest and eliminate a problem for farmers. Some species of parasitic wasps are known to be very aggressive and will travel 20 to 25 miles to find its host beetle. Lueck says it'll take a couple of years for the wasps to become established enough to do their job. In the meantime it may be necessary to spray some of the more infested fields in the area. Consultation from county agents is recommended.



The wasp does its deadly dance at the expense of the cereal leaf beetle, a pest which can cut an oat crop in half.



Lancaster County Agent Arnold Lueck distributes the parasitic wasps as eggs inside their host -- the cereal leaf beetle. The organisms are grown on oats. Each of the plants Lueck has with him contains one of the pests which has been impregnated by the parasitic wasps. Lueck then places each of these specially prepared oat stalks on oats in a field. From there, Nature is left to do the rest.

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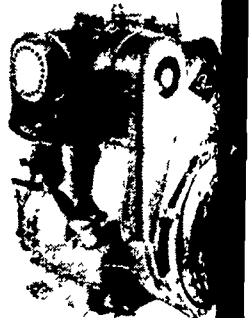
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