

# Worms attacking \$40 million crops

NEWARK, Del. - As if the shortage of rainfall weren't trouble enough for one season, Delaware farmers are now facing a serious threat to those crops which so far have managed to struggle through this Summer's drought. An invasion of four different but equally destructive kinds of worms is working its relentless way up the Delmarva peninsula. Nearly \$40 million worth of crops are at stake.

The hungry larvae - which include the Fall armyworm, corn earworm, beet armyworm, and yellow-striped armyworm - are already active in fields of soybeans,

limas and green peppers in Sussex County, reports University of Delaware Extension pest management specialist Mark Graustein. And he doesn't expect the voracious army to spare any part of the state.

The specialist, who heads the Delaware Cooperative Extension Service's 6-year-old pest management program, has been anxiously watching signs of the insect buildup over the last few weeks. On August 16 he sent out an alert in his regular weekly report that goes to many area farmers, warning them of what to expect.

By now things have broken wide open in the worse infestation of these worms in the past 10 years. The need at this stage is to help growers identify the larvae which are devouring crops in particular fields and then to advise them on appropriate control measures. The situation is made more serious by the fact that all the pesticides effective against the worms are presently in very short supply.

The infestation is being monitored by Graustein and his crew of four field scouts. At present they are surveying fields of cooperating growers twice a week in order to keep tabs on this and other potential insect build-ups. They also base their evaluation of the problem on the number of

egg laying moths found in black light traps located at 16 stations around the state.

They say that virtually every acre of late planted field corn they've looked at is infested with fall armyworms, and several fields have already been sprayed twice because of continued egg laying pressure.

Corn earworm moth activity has also exploded during the last few weeks, with light trap catches averaging well over 100 per night at many locations. This is four to five times above the expected normal trend for this time of year. Now that most corn is too far advanced for egg laying, limas, snap beans, peppers and soybeans are coming under heavy attack.

The beet armyworm will defoliate peppers, limas and soybeans as well as attack the fruit, and is probably the most difficult of the worms to control, says Graustein. The best chemicals for control of all four larvae are: Lanate, Nudrin and Otheene. Sevin, another insecticide in much more abundant supply right now, is effective only on the corn earworm.

The specialist urges farmers to contact him or their county Extension agent for help in identifying the specific type in infestation they have in their fields before attempting treatment.

As pest management specialist, in the past Graustein has helped Delaware farmers save hundreds of thousands of dollars by advising them against unnecessary insecticide use. This time he again hopes to help them save money by timely, appropriate sprayings. For effective control, he says that it is essential to wait until larval buildup is in substantial numbers, because spraying won't kill the eggs from which worms hatch, and a premature application will only waste scarce and costly chemicals.

In soybean fields, the economic threshold at which spraying will save (rather than waste) money, comes when pest populations average one larva per foot of row in wide-spaced rows, or one worm per three feet in 20-inch or narrower rows. These thresholds should be lowered, however, if drought has reduced pod set on soybeans.

The entomologist speculates that the disastrous pest buildup may have resulted from two factors. First, corn (the preferred host of the worms) is being planted earlier each year, thus providing an excellent food source for overwintering adult moths to lay their eggs in when they emerge early each spring. Also, the drought damage on this year's corn crop has dried up plants earlier than usual, forcing the worms to seek other hosts. Still-succulent beans and peppers have thus drawn their unwelcome attention.

The endangered crops include more than 200,000 acres of soybeans - a major crop worth more than \$33 million in farm income; about 14,000 acres of lima

beans worth about \$3 million; and green peppers with an expected value of more than \$2 million. The threat to these crops could continue until the first frost.

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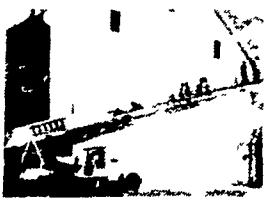
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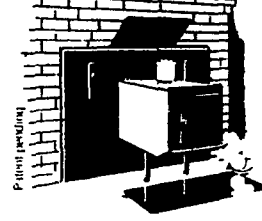
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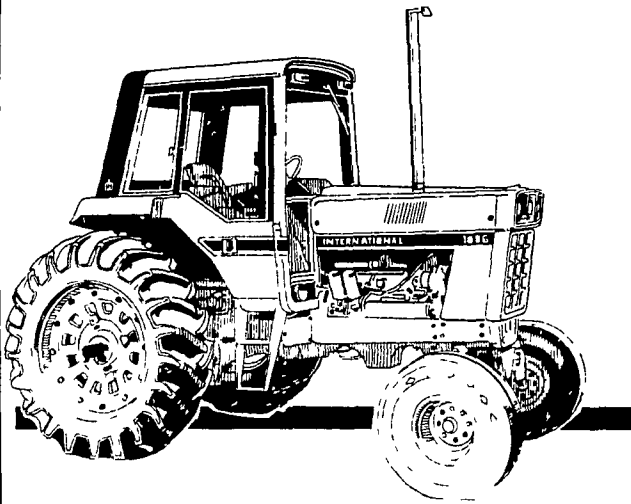
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