

# Alfalfa weevil parasites found in Pennsylvania

LANCASTER — Tiny wasps—parasites of the alfalfa weevil—have been found over much of the East and Midwest in a survey that is the first step in a major biological control effort, U.S. Department of Agriculture officials said today.

“Bug hunters” from USDA’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service have spent the summer

combing alfalfa fields in selected areas of Pennsylvania, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, Virginia, West Virginia and Wisconsin, looking for the parasites.

The parasites were released over several years in those states but have not been confirmed as established in many areas.

“We’ve been looking principally for two species of parasites of the weevil,” said USDA field coordinator Thomas Burger, based in Niles, Mich. “We know that they and other parasite species are saving farmers in the northeastern states over \$7 million a year in alfalfa weevil control costs, but there’s never been a systematic survey to find out

if they’re on the job in other areas as well.”

The weevil damages alfalfa—the nation’s leading hay crop and essential for successful dairy farming—by feeding on the plant’s tips, leaves and buds, causing an estimated \$250 million damage per year. It was first found in the United States in 1904 in Utah. It showed up in New Jersey in

the 1950’s and has since spread throughout most U.S. alfalfa-growing areas.

The current survey is being made in preparation for mass release of the weevil parasites. It is part of a stepped-up biological control effort -- in cooperation with the department’s Science and Education Administration and the states -- to develop

and implement environmentally sound pest-control methods involving use of parasites, predators, pathogens (diseases) and other biological methods.

“The parasites help control the weevil by laying their eggs in weevil larvae or other life stages,” said Burger. “The young parasites feed on internal organs of the weevil, killing it.”

Certain species of the parasites were found for the first time in Iowa, Kentucky, Michigan and Wisconsin, plus 65 other counties in these and other survey states.

In addition to the detection survey, USDA coordinated a search for insectary-insect nursery-sites in Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Missouri, Minnesota and Wisconsin. Sites for 11 insectaries were located and parasites released in seven.

In years to come these will serve as sites from which parasitized weevil may be collected for redistribution to areas where needed to provide control. Areas in Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan and New Jersey were also searched for already-established concentrations of parasites for use as additional collection points.

In 1981 USDA plans to release limited numbers of parasites in this year’s survey states and conduct additional surveys in North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Tennessee, South Carolina North Carolina and Virginia. By the end of 1982, all major U.S. alfalfa growing areas will have been surveyed and major parasite redistribution operation will be underway.



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