

How to handle black cutworm

SMYRNA, Del — In spite of the fact that relatively few cornfields in Delaware encounter economic levels of black cutworm, it seems that cutworms are "everywhere" to those growers who have corn with cutworm problems.

Overall cutworm activity has been slightly higher in certain areas of the state during the last three seasons, while last season (1980) it was somewhat lower in certain other areas with a history of cutworm problems, according to Delaware extension pest management specialist Mark Graustein.

In the spring, cutworms can be

found in a variety of sizes. This makes the cutworm problem harder to handle since the small and medium sized larvae will continue to feed and grow, while the larger larvae are very tolerant to insecticides.

Because it is impossible to predict when and where cutworms will be a problem further complicates things for growers.

A cutworm generally feeds at or just below the surface of the soil. When it's small it chews into a corn stalk, either cutting it off or causing it to fall over. Each cutworm can cut from four to six plants during its life cycle.

Because cutworms are night feeders, a grower might not even suspect a problem until the weather turns warm, which makes cutworms active. The pests can cause economic damage to a field in two or three days of warm weather, catching some growers completely unaware.

To prevent this from happening, a grower should check twice a week for cut plants, from the time the corn sprouts until it is two feet high. A rescue application of pesticide is necessary when two to three percent of the plants are damaged.

Be objective when checking for

damage, Graustein emphasizes. Don't get excited about a few cut plants out of thousands in an entire field. To find out if two percent of the plants are damaged, follow this procedure:

Walk 30 paces into the field, stop, and count 20 plants, beginning with the first plant next to the right foot. Count the number of cut plants in that 20. Follow the same procedure in four other randomly selected spots in the field. When you are finished, you will have examined 100 plants.

If two to three of those plants are damaged, a rescue treatment is necessary, according to Graustein.

At-planting treatments are not recommended except in the case of high-risk fields, since rescue treatments are sometimes necessary even if at-planting treatments have been made.

A field is considered high risk if it is low lying, is poorly drained, has moderate to heavy weed growth, particularly broadleaf weeds like chickweed; has a great deal of crop residue, was late-planted, has a history of cutworm

trouble; or if it is a no-till field where vetch or other leguminous cover crop was used. The more of these criteria a particular field meets, the higher the risk of spring cutworm attack.

Growers with high-risk fields who wish to use an at-planting treatment may want to consider either of two new treatments that have become available this year. Two liquid chemicals, Lorsban 4-E and Dyfonate 4-E, can be broadcast preplant incorporated with herbicides. This saves trips through the field.

Newly labeled Lorsban 4-E can be broadcast P P I at the rate of 2-4 quarts per acre, or Dyfonate at the rate of 4 quarts per acre. Growers should remember that some preplanting treatments are labeled to suppress, rather than to control cutworms while others are labeled to control light to moderate infestations only, according to Graustein.

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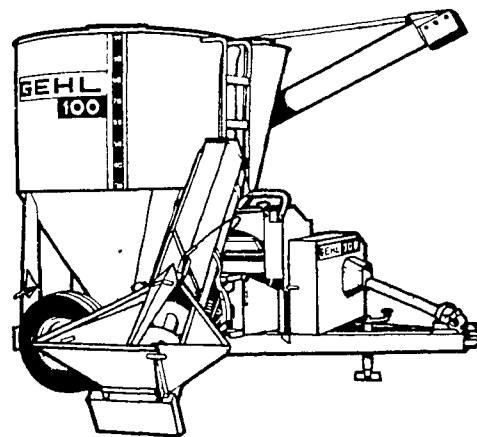
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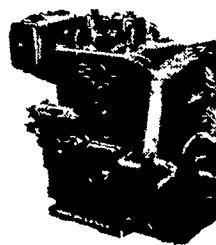
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