

Mexican bean beetle damage on increase

NEWARK, Del. — Economic infestations of Mexican bean beetle are occurring in scattered soybean plantings around Delaware — a sign beetle populations are up over the last two years.

But this doesn't mean farmers should write off the little wasp with the big name — *Pediobius foveolatus* — released to control the beetles. "The parasite has done a good job for the most part," says University of Delaware Extension pest management specialist Mark Graustein. "It's been most effective where spring release sites (nurse plots) were close enough to provide good cover of the target area."

Graustein blames the weather for the current build-up of MBB numbers. "The climate has been very kind to the pest this year," he says. Compared to 1980 and 1981, when it was so hot and dry many beetles died of desiccation, conditions generally have been moister around the state. On the

other hand, the cool, wet start to the growing season made it harder for parasites to become established.

"The beetle is vulnerable to the parasite only in the larval stage, and there was a long lag between emergence of first and second generation MBB larvae this year," Graustein says. Since *P. foveolatus* must have a host in order to survive, the lag probably reduced its ability to suppress MBB in certain fields.

In spite of this, the entomologist says the control program is working most places. "There appear to be more economic infestations of MBB outside the target area than within," he notes. "More nurse plots might have helped, where a problem does exist."

Delaware's current Mexican bean beetle control program is based on a cooperative effort between the state's Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The USDA

provided the parasites. State entomologist Lynn Harrison coordinated the program, setting up snap bean nurse plots on cooperating farms, scouting MBB larvae to learn when to make releases, and making sure enough parasites were released. She also has been actively involved in evaluating the success of the parasite in suppressing MBB populations on soybeans in the release area.

There were 35 release sites in Delaware this year, most of them in the area between Middletown and Harrington west of route 13. A total of 231,000 parasites were released — about 12,000 more than actually needed, based on MBB counts.

Where nurse plots were fairly close together, beetle control has been good. However, beetle infestations are now approaching economic levels in soybeans near or within some release areas. Graustein says he and Harrison feel this is largely because of the

weather.

As the third generation of MBB comes on, he expects to see parasitism pick up. Some beetles are emerging now, though peak MBB hatch and larval feeding won't take place for another week or so. This is later than usual — again, probably because of the weather. It's too soon to tell whether or not the delay will have an impact on the population that overwinters.

Time is running out on Delaware's Mexican bean beetle control program, the specialist says. The USDA will probably support it for only one more season. This means growers and grower organizations must consider whether the program is valuable enough to support locally after that. "I personally feel it's worth continuing," Graustein says.

According to Penn State Ex-

tension entomologist Stan Gesell, the Mexican bean beetle is in the state but is not yet an "economic problem" for Pennsylvania soybean farmers. "Perhaps in another three to five years it will be if more farmers begin growing soybeans and more acres are planted."

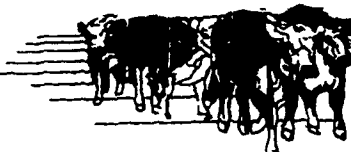
In Maryland, entomologist John Hellman reports MBB damage hasn't been as extensive this year as in previous years. He notes, however, that most of the damage is experienced in the last few weeks of the growing season, when the second generation of the insects attack the plants.

"Cool weather slows MBB's development," Hellman explains. "We expect some injury, but not much."

Maryland's Department of Agriculture also is cooperating with U.S. Department of Agriculture in a parasite program.

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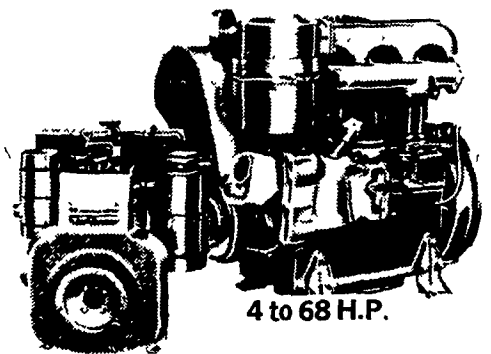
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