

Dectes stem borer affecting Del. soybeans

NEWARK, Del. — A 1982 University of Delaware survey has shown that the Dectes stem borer is present in many Delaware soybean fields. The insect, which formerly infested only weeds,

appears to be evolving so that it also overwinters in soybeans. When it does this it can seriously reduce yields.

Last summer university scientists found adult Dectes borers

on common ragweed plants in 18 out of 30 fields monitored weekly from July 27 to August 29 in Kent and Sussex counties. Adults also were found on ragweed growing in soybeans in parts of New Castle

County and nearby states.

The survey was conducted by a team of research and extension personnel with the aid of a \$4,500 grant from the Delaware Soybean Check-off Board. Purpose of the study was to determine how widely distributed the Dectes stem borer is in Delaware and how much soybean damage its larvae cause.

The survey was proposed after the 1981 discovery of heavy Dectes infestations in soybeans on three farms in the Lewes-Milton area. Besides monitoring adult populations during the growing season, the scientists also inspected soybean stubble after harvest last fall for presence of overwintering larvae.

In most cases, Dectes adults were found on ragweed growing among soybean plants. Ragweed, along with cocklebur, is one of the insect's major weed hosts. At some sites, adult borers also were found on soybeans. On at least two sites, borers had infested an entire field, even though no ragweed was present.

Charles Mason, researcher with the University of Delaware Agricultural Experiment Station who took part in the search, and other entomologists are concerned over the widespread presence of Dectes in Delaware soybean fields.

"This little insect has caused severe damage on only seven or eight farms growing soybeans in the state so far, but it's a real problem for the farmers who have it," Mason says. "They're pulling out their hair trying to control it." Though it is a relatively new soybean pest in Delaware, Dectes has been a serious concern of North Carolina soybean producers for several years.

To date, eight Delaware sites—all in Sussex County—have been found with Dectes-damaged soybeans. Of the varieties tested,

Essex and Ware appear to be more susceptible than others. North Carolina entomologists say there is evidence that larval feeding within plants causes about 10 percent yield loss. But most damage occurs from lodging after borers hollow out stems as they tunnel toward the base of the plants where they overwinter. Depending on the weather, over half the infested plants in a field may lodge before harvest, making it difficult to recover the beans.

Insect-induced lodging is most severe in earlier planted beans, Mason says, especially in fields where soybeans were grown the previous year and where beans aren't harvested promptly at maturity.

"This insect appears to have transferred from weedy hosts to soybeans in some parts of the state," the entomologist says. "Where it does reproduce in soybeans, populations are generally high enough to cause economic losses."

University extension entomologist Mark Graustein shares Mason's concern. At present no pesticides are labeled for Dectes control, and current cropping practices on the Delmarva peninsula appear to favor the insect's shift to soybeans.

"At this time we feel the only way to control the Dectes stem borer is to rotate out of soybeans if at all possible," Graustein says. Preferably, growers should switch to corn or some other nonhost crop, or try to grow soybeans on land which has been used for these other crops—especially fields which are free of common ragweed. He says damage from lodging is most likely to occur on no-till full-season soybeans growing where soybeans grew last year.

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