

Fewer corn borers expected

NEWARK, Del: — Most Delawareans who are involved in farming would probably agree that the European corn borer (ECB) is the state's most serious field corn pest. Entomologists generally credit first generation borers with causing yield losses of 3 percent per borer per plant. What's the potential for economic damage from this insect during the 1984 season?

Indications are ECB pressure may be lower than usual, based on the University of Delaware's 1983 fall abundance survey. According to extension pest management specialist Joanne Whalen, the overwintering population hasn't been so slow since 1976. "In some cases," she says, "larvae were either diseased or parasitized. While sampling cornstalks for ECB pupation two weeks ago, I found very few infested stalks. These low populations should translate into low first brood infestations. Growers may still see some feeding damage; however, infestations should remain below

the level where it pays to use an insecticide."

Whalen reminds growers that early-planted corn is likely to have the highest infestations. European corn borer moths are attracted to the tallest corn in an area and lay their eggs on these early plantings. They won't lay eggs on corn less than 10 inches tall. Economic infestations could occur in a few early-planted fields, so it's still important to scout fields for larvae.

"If you plan to use a soil insecticide for ECB, consider the relationship between environmental factors and borer development before treating all your acreage," the specialist advises. Corn planted near the time of apple bloom will be most susceptible to attack. However, applying soil insecticides at that time will be of little benefit against the borer because these insecticides will lose their effectiveness before peak larval feeding occurs. So a whorl treatment will provide better control in early plantings.

Corn planted from dogwood to early crimson clover bloom (mid-planted) will benefit most from an at-planting treatment. In this case, enough insecticide will remain in plants to provide adequate control when needed. Under high ECB pressure, a whorl treatment generally provides better control, however.

Late-planted corn encounters little or no first brood pressure because egg-laying is generally finished before the corn is tall enough to attract moths. So there's no point in using a soil insecticide for ECB control. Second brood ECB may attack this corn, but an at-planting treatment won't help, Whalen says.

Start scouting for larval feeding on a weekly basis when corn is 18 inches high. Sample more often when borer populations approach a threshold level. Base treatment decisions on a random sample of 20 consecutive plants in five locations throughout a field.

"We recommend insecticide treatment when half the plants sampled are infested with live larvae," she says. "Be sure to check for feeding on whorl leaves in the centers of plants. If you find damage only on fully opened leaves, the plants may no longer be infested with live larvae."

For more information on in-season corn borer development, Delaware residents can call the University of Delaware's crop pest hotline, 1-800-345-7544. Information will be updated each Wednesday by 10 a.m.



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