

Scout for Black Cutworms now

NEWARK, DEL. — Black cutworms don't attack field corn every year on Delmarva, but when this insect does occur, it can quickly cause economic damage. Research has shown that only one cutworm feeding in every 3 feet of corn row produces an average yield loss of 45 bushels an acre. So it's important to find and control the pest early.

According to University of Delaware extension pest management specialist Joanne Whalen, cutworms could be a problem this year in some fields because cool, wet spring weather delayed tillage and planting, allowing development of dense weed covers that are very attractive to them. In addition, pheromone and blacklight trap catches of adults are up from last season, indicating higher populations. Adult moths started to emerge in late March and laid their eggs in areas with dense weed growth and high soil moisture.

In general, says Whalen, growers are most likely to find cutworm outbreaks under the following field conditions: (1) when no-till corn is planted into corn and soybean stubble, (2) when fields are poorly drained, (3) when fields are planted later in the spring, or (4) when broadleaf weed growth (especially chickweed) is present prior to spring tillage or planting.

How much damage occurs in such fields will depend on the size of the larvae and the corn plants. Young cutworm larvae feed on weeds and corn leaves until they're about half an inch long. Older larvae feed at or below the soil surface, causing cut or wilted plants. Fields with high cutworm populations are most vulnerable to damage and yield loss during the period from plant emergence through the first-leaf stage. A single cutworm can cut up to five plants during its lifetime.

Since egg laying occurs over a long period, Whalen advises

growers to scout untreated fields as well as fields treated with a preplant or at-planting insecticide for signs of cutworm activity. Start looking for leaf feeding and cut plants on a weekly basis as soon as plants emerge and continue to scout until the four-leaf stage. Sample more often if there is feeding injury and cutworm populations approach a threshold level. Be sure to dig around the base of the plants for live larvae. Base treatment decisions on a random sample of 20 consecutive plants in five locations throughout a field.

"In general," says the specialist, "we recommend an insecticide treatment on corn in the one- to two-leaf stage when 3 percent or more of the plants are cut and you find two or more larvae per 100


plants. For a more precise control decision, take into account the size of the larvae before applying a rescue treatment."

Larvae ranging from 1/2-inch to 1 1/4 inches in length will continue to feed for approximately 10 to 14 days. By the time they reach 3/4 inch in size, they can cut many plants. Cutworms over 1 1/2 inches long are almost through feeding, and also harder to kill, Whalen says, so there's no point in treating for them.

Torsban 4E, Pydrin 2.4EC, Sevin

5% Bait or Toxaphene can be used as rescue treatments, she says. But Toxaphene doesn't consistently control larvae longer than half an inch. Any rescue treatment is less effective when the top 1 to 2 inches of soil are dry because cutworms will then feed primarily below the soil surface.

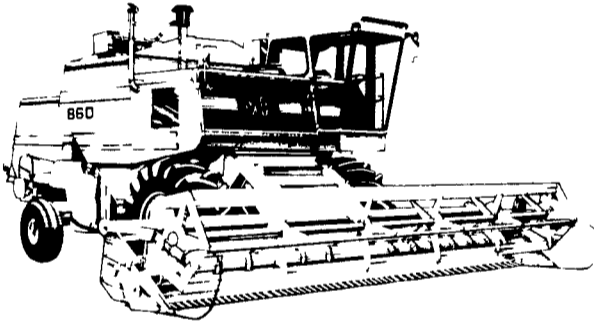
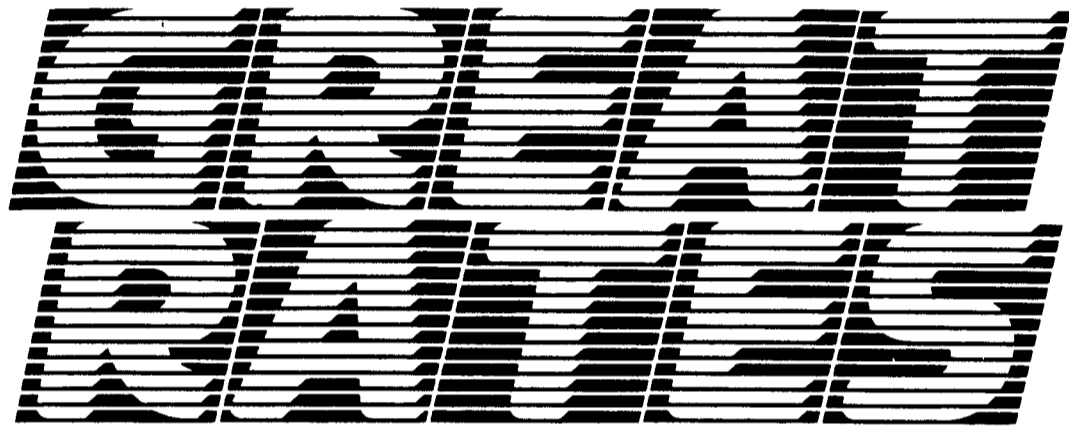
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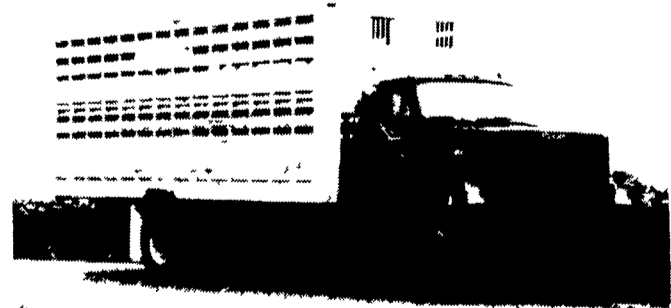
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