

Check beans for pod worms

NEWARK, Del. — During the early stages of pod formation, soybean plants can tolerate large amounts of pod damage without yield loss. Research has shown that plants compensate for pod loss by increasing seed weight and suppressing the natural abortion of excess pods. However, significant yield losses can occur when pods are damaged after seed enlargement, so close monitoring and early detection of pod feeders are needed to keep populations at low levels.

According to Delaware extension pest management specialist Joanne Whalen, the corn earworm, fall armyworm, and beet armyworm are the most common pod feeders found in local soybean fields. All three species migrate northward and can be found in Delaware from June on. Adult moths lay their eggs on corn and grassy weeds until early August. Once these plants mature and dry down, moths begin to lay eggs on soybeans and other

alternative host plants.

Since the corn earworm is by far the most important pod feeder on area soybeans, it's important to know which fields are most attractive to egg laying moths. Generally, says Whalen, late blooming, open canopy soybeans are favored. If peak flowering occurs when moths are abundant, economic levels of earworm feeding are likely to occur.

Another factor which affects egg laying is the openness of the

canopy. Earworm moths prefer to lay eggs in the interior of plants. Therefore, growers are more likely to find high populations in wide row, open canopy plantings. Narrow row plantings generally have tightly closed canopies when moths are abundant, so earworms do not build to economic levels in them.

The specialist advises farmers to start looking for corn earworm and fall armyworm larval feeding on soybean leaves in early August.

Initially larvae feed on leaves, flower buds, and young pods. But larvae more than half an inch long feed on developing pods and can cause yield losses in a short time, so sampling for young larvae gives growers 5 to 7 days to make a spray decision or to resample a field.

Unlike the corn earworm and fall armyworm, the beet armyworm generally feeds on foliage. Larvae don't begin feeding on pods until they're at least an inch long and populations are extremely high. All three insects damage pods in the same manner, but beet ar-

myworms are very hard to control with insecticides, Whalen says. This is why it's important to know which species is causing the damage before making a control decision.

The following descriptions should help soybean producers identify pod feeding worms:

— Fall armyworm - Larvae have three yellowish-white hairlines down their back and four black dots on the last abdominal segment. They can be distinguished from earworms and beet armyworms by the prominent inverted Y on the front of the head.

— Corn earworm - Larvae vary from light green or pink to dark brown. They are inactive when disturbed and will roll up in a C when knocked off a plant.

— Beet armyworm - Larvae are green with a black dot above the second pair of true legs.

Whalen says to start looking for small podworms on a weekly basis in early August. Check fields twice a week after the first worms are found. Base control decision on a 3-foot x 3-foot shake cloth sample taken in five to 10 random areas throughout a field. It is also possible to estimate populations by taking a random sample of five sweeps in five areas of a field.

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