

# Worm Devastates Corn Roots

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the Landisville farm," said Roth. "Even so, we took the conservative approach and planted all our experiments here. We put down a pre-plant insecticide at planting time in late April."

Last week, Joanne Stellingwerf, Penn State ag technician, noticed what may have been windstorm damage to the crops. "I thought it was a pretty severe windstorm," said Roth. "(So I) came down here today, looked it over, and found a lot of the characteristic symptoms of corn root worm feeding."

Roth said many farmers may be familiar with the infestation. He showed the visitors the roots of several stalks that were infested.

### Older roots chewed off

"A classic example is on one plant, where the older roots have



John Yokum, head of the Landisville Research Station, speaks to the 80 participants of the Weeds Field Day before heading out to the test plots.

just been completely chewed off," he said. "This plant was laying flat on the ground. This is not going to come back. This is going to contribute to a serious yield loss."

Farmers may be facing extreme losses, according to several experts, if dry weather continues.

"If you just see a little bit of goosenecking, then we have fairly moist conditions following this time of the year, the plants can compensate. You can see some of these plants are putting out new roots, and sometimes they'll come back and you'll be hard to even pick up a yield response," Roth said. "If it turns dry, however, yield can be cut severely."

Roth cited a lack of control by several insecticides that may have broken down because of the large amount of rain in May. Though it is hard to determine exactly what type of pesticide is most effective against the bug — pre- or post-emergence — some form of pesticide must be used, especially if the farmer is not going to rotate out of corn. Mid-July is when the control is necessary, according to Roth, when the larvae are actively feeding.

### Pennsylvania hit hard

South central and southeastern Pennsylvania are being hit hard by the root worm, as well as western Pennsylvania, according to several agents.

"It's worse than I have ever seen it," said Ed Lazowski, field sales agronomy manager for Pioneer.



Frank Richards, a salesman with P.L. Rohrer in Smoke-town, examines a potato plot to see the spray effects of a pesticide to combat potato beetles on Monday at the Weeds Field Day.

Lazowski attributed the problem to many farmers who have shied away from using insecticides at planting time. "It's starting to catch up to us now," he said. "Last year there was a lot of corn planted over a long period of time, so it's very wet in the planting season. What happens is, in August, the plant is silking out and the silks dry up, and the bugs migrate to new fields."

*'We want to warn these people — particularly the extension agents, consultants, and others — that there's a problem out there with western corn root worm.'*

The bugs lay their eggs at the adult stage, when their life cycle ends. Farmers should be out scouting for the bugs to determine the pesticide plan they will use at planting time next season.

"Be on the lookout for this problem," said Roth. "If you see a lot of this occurring, give us a call so we can get a handle on how widespread this problem is."

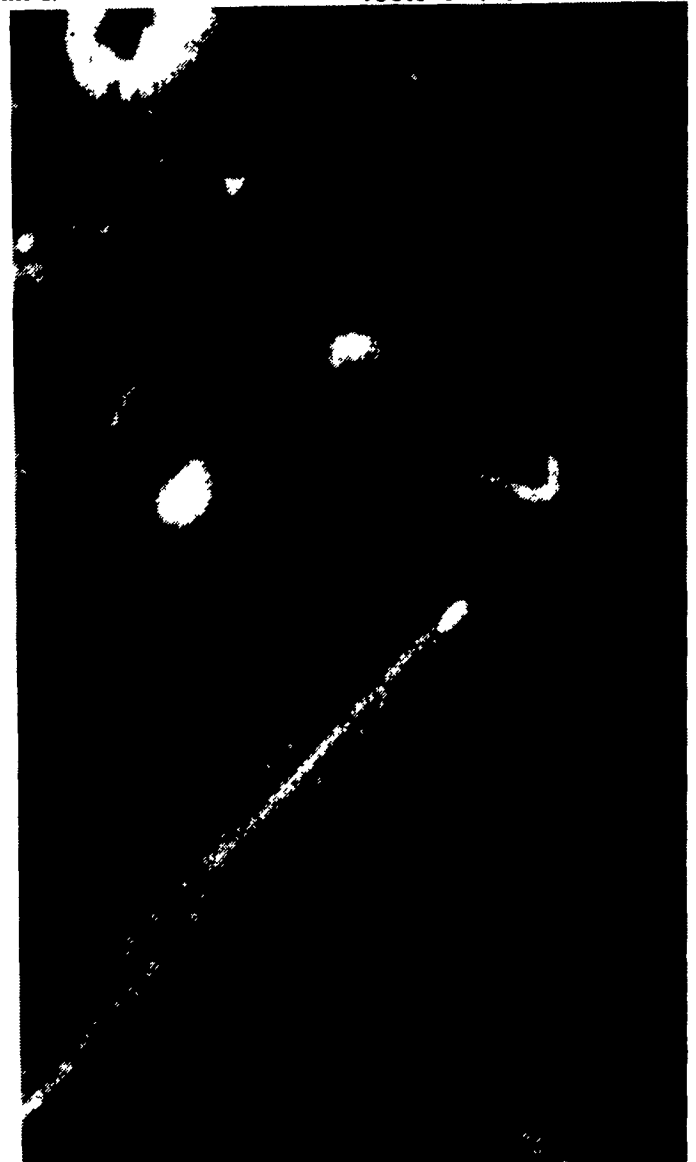
"That's one of the reasons we brought this up," said Yokum, "to alert you guys that, all of a sudden, it looks like we're going to have a problem out here, so that next year we need to be talking to the farmers."



An adult beetle of the western corn root worm. The black-bodied insect with long antennae feeds on the cornstalk silks in the summer and lays eggs. Next season, the resulting white larvae, about a quarter to a half inch long with a black head, then feed on the roots of the corn stalk.



Greg Roth, Penn State corn specialist, describes the effects of western corn root worm on corn stalks to the members of the Weeds Field Day tour group.



The western corn root worm is shown at the end of the pen. The whitish or yellowish worm is devouring the roots in many corn fields, and could create a serious yield loss after wet, then extremely dry weather. The infestation could occur again next season if farmers do not apply pesticide or rotate out of corn.