Ephrata Young Farmers Tour Test Site

Farmers Should Treat For Cutworm Before Corn Losses Escalate

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SPRINGVILLE (Lancaster Co.) — Cutworm is out in force now, devastating many young corn plants. But it's not too late to act to reduce potential crop losses, according to Rob Kauffman and Mike Brubaker, agronomists.

About 15 farmers inspected some of the damage to crops under variety and yield study. This was held during the monthly meeting on Tuesday evening of the Ephrata Area Young Farmers Association (EAYFA) at the Hibshman Farmstead, courtesy of Mary Schantz.

Brubaker Agronomic Consulting Service (BACS) President Mike Brubaker, which utilizes the Hibshman Farmstead for BACS field studies, said that the cutworm, which can measure up to ½ inch, has overwintered in some fields and poses a threat.

'We just found out within the last couple of days about the cutworm. Apparently it's a real problem," said Brubaker.

He told the farmers that as a result of the cutworm infestation, the center part of the young corn plant starts to wilt down. Farmers who inspect the fields now who see the telltale wilting, and dig around the roots to find the worm (three plants per 100 is the threshold), should treat the fields with an appropriate, labeled insecticide.

Also, BACS has checked a field along Rt. 272 and also noticed the cutworm, which feeds on plants, especially in fields that use no-till. Brubaker said his office plans to do a pest alert because BACS believes there's enough cutworm pressure right now.

"Cutworms do most of their feeding at night," he said. "Your pesticide will be the most potent then. So if you can treat about this time, it will be an ideal time to spray. We found it just knocks them out real well."

Another pest farmers should be concerned about is the flea beetle.

"We have a lot more injury from flea beetle than what we ever suspected," said Brubaker. The beetle feeds on the leaves. "It's more and more of a concern," he said. Thresholds for treatment are about 3-4 beetles per plant.

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Rob Kauffman, agronomy technician and farm manager with BACS who supervises the farmstead test plots, conducted a tour of the various agronomic crop trials under way. About 71 acres are in test, with a variety of corn, soybean, alfalfa, barley, and other crops.

According to Kauffman, the intent of the test site is to study yields, fertilizer and herbicide use, and variety performance on different crops and to "conduct research in an environment as similar to normal farming practices as possible and stay away from a lot of small-plot replicators," he said. Included is a grain corn variety trial with 27 different hybrids, in plots ranging from 1/10 to 1/2 acre. BACS is working with the cooperation of about 14 seed corn companies (to study variety performance and yield) and about six chemical companies (to study herbicide performance). Also, fertilizer studies, utilizing various amounts of inorganic and organic materials, are under way.

BACS will also be conducting a "Roundup-ready" soybean variety study. According to Brubaker, Monsanto, the manufacturer of the herbicide Roundup, has been working with seed companies for some years to make the soybean plant resistant to Roundup.

"They, along with a number of seed companies, have done that successfully, and it's very significant," said Brubaker. "The technology which will enable farmers to grow soybeans and apply Roundup directly to the plants is being perfected by Monsanto, but is not yet available to the general public."

The soybeans will grow and develop a canopy, and will be sprayed, weeds and all, at about the 3-4 trifoliate.

Also, BACS will be conducting application reviews of the new Penn State chlorophyll meter. The meter can be used, on the spot, to indicate how much nitrogen the plant may need.

Other studies under way include herbicide trials vs. tillage, soybean variety trials, response to soybean varieties with herbicides, alfalfa trials (nine different varieties), and a field silage trial with 11 different varieties. Also, a barley study

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PDA Advises

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BVD or PI3 should avoid contact with other herds and should change clothing and footwear before leaving affected farms.

The dairy herds currently under investigation are located in Crawford and Mercer counties.

BVD infection may cause fever, loss of appetite, depression, diarrhea, abortion and, in severe cases, death. PI3 infection causes similar signs but also results in severe respiratory disease, including pneumonia.

A vaccine is available to reduce disease from these infections. Neither of these diseases are communicable to man, nor do they have serious consequences for other species.