

Natural 'Predator' Beetle Could Control Poultry House Flies

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MANHEIM (Lancaster Co.) — Entomology professor Charles Pitts remembers when, a few months ago, while sorting through layer house manure in Maytown, he found some strange-looking beetles.

At first, Penn State referred to the unknown predator as the Maytown beetle. But they realized it had a documented name — the red-legged ham beetle. Scientific name? *Necrobia rufipes*.

What the Penn State fly research specialist found was that the beetle is a natural, generalized predator that could eat fly larvae and eggs. Fly specialists may have struck gold, in a way, because now another beetle could possibly be used to combat the nagging flies prevalent in layer and broiler houses.

Pitts spoke to about 33 producers and agri-industry representatives about the research on the red-legged ham beetle and other ground-breaking university research on fly control in poultry houses last week at the Penn-State sponsored Poultry Management and Health Seminar at Kreider's Restaurant.

The beetle, measuring only about a quarter inch in size with a

midnight metallic green color, sports reddish legs. The males are smaller than the females, but the mature beetle and the larvae sport good mandibles for eating. The larvae is white with a reddish-brown head and tail.

The beetle is "a new thing we ran into that might be an additional tool" to control fly populations in poultry houses, noted Pitts. Problem is, more research is needed to ensure that the natural predator doesn't eat other types of beetles used in the house to control flies.

Studies are under way to see if, when the house populations of fly larvae drop and food becomes scarce for the red-legged beetle, it doesn't resort to eating dry food or the live natural beetles used in the house.

Also, Pitts has helped coordinate and conduct research into the use of pH controls on fly populations. He has used various acid treatments. The pH has been lowered in samples of manure, which kills fly populations readily. Recommendations can be used for spot treatments in the manure, according to Pitts. But right now, use of pH is too expensive for whole house treatments.

Also, more work is under way on the use of black plastic on manure. Windrowing piles of manure

with one triple axle load, covered over with black plastic and sealed with dirt, considerably reduce fly populations over two weeks. The ammonia released by the manure kills the fly population.

In addition, more homeowners are taking the initiative to deal with flies. A successful test was undertaken in Clinton County using a variety of fly traps, spaced 50 feet apart at least 50 feet away from the houses, along with fly strips on the front and back porches of houses. The important key is the baits draw flies, and need to be set up a distance of at least 50 feet from the house. The fly traps are inexpensive, and using a dry bait works well.

At the meeting, Pitts asked the producers to consider that cockroaches, in addition to mice, could spread salmonella both mechanically and biologically in the poultry house. It is important to inspect houses at night, because roaches are nocturnal insects. They can spread salmonella readily through a poultry house.

Now that spring is here, fly concerns will be on the uprise, according to Pitts. An issue that occupies the mind of Pitts is the "ag-urban interface" and the importance of communication between farm neighbors.

"A lot of people are picking up on it very well," he said. "They think it's a serious thing and they're working with the neighbors and talking to them."

"But there are still some people in the industry that are not being cooperative and it's causing them a lot of grief."

It is important to keep the talks and the "interchange" of ideas to solve the problems going.

"You can save yourself a lot of grief if you really talk with these people and not try to ignore them," he said.

Pitts recalled one producer who spread chicken manure, along with partially composted chickens, into a field, and dogs walked into the fields and dragged the carcasses away.

"The attitude you take in working with these people is key," he said.

Income Opportunities Seminar

BEDFORD (Bedford Co.) — The cooperative extension services of Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Virginia and Maryland, and the Saint Francis College Small Business Development Center have announced a sixth annual seminar designed to help develop income opportunities for rural people.

The seminar is scheduled for April 13 at the Everett High School in Everett, Pennsylvania. The cost is \$25 per person and cover lunch, breaks and printed materials. (A \$10 discount is offered for a second person from the same farm or home.)

The deadline for registration is April 5.

The annual event brings

together landowners and producers of specialty crops and services with regional experts in many non-traditional farm and forest enterprises.

Production topics are to include raising Christmas trees, deer farming, herbs, woodlots, meat goats, organic foods, fish farming, mushrooms, portable sawmills, ginseng and plant nurseries.

The seminar is for those who want to supplement income, investigate new ventures, or diversify existing operations.

For more information, call a local extension office or Susan Fox, director of the Bedford County Cooperative Extension, at (814) 623-4800. Bedford is serving as the host extension service office.

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