

ARMYWORMS IN CORN?

By Ric Bessin



As corn begins to emerge, growers will soon need to be scouting of 'true' armyworms as there have been very high trap catch levels last week in central and western KY. There will be a lag time between these high trap catches and the emergence of the larvae in small grains, pastures and corn. For that reason growers need to monitor their corn throughout the month of May. We have had return of cool conditions which tend to favor true armyworm and slowed corn emergence and growth.

When scouting for armyworm, watch for feeding on the leaf margins. Feeding is usually confined to leaf margins, but occasionally they may strip the entire plant leaving only the midrib of the leaves. During the day, armyworms are found in the soil or underneath ground cover. Corn can usually recover from light to moderate feeding by armyworm without significant yield loss. However, severe damage, particularly if the growing bud is injured, can cause significant loss in yield. But corn will provide some protection, but large numbers or large larvae migrating from grassy areas may cause some loss.

Scouting is used to determine if armyworms are present (identify hot spots) and to evaluate if they are worth treating. Survey field edges that border small grains or large grassy areas, and watch for damaged plants. If the characteristic armyworm damage is observed while scouting, look on the ground for armyworms or their black pepper-like droppings littering the ground. To sample for armyworms, examine 20 consecutive plants in each of at least 5 random locations in the field. Note the number of plants with the characteristic damage and the size of the larvae.

Scout the field margins of conventional fields first, particularly adjacent to small grains or grassy strips. If armyworms or damage is found, then determine how far the infestation extends into the field. Often armyworms can be controlled by treating just a portion of the field.

Before deciding whether to treat for armyworms with an insecticide, there are a few things to consider. First, what sizes are the armyworms. If the armyworms are longer

than about 1-1/4 inch they have completed most of their feeding. Controlling larvae of this size is not profitable because the damage is already done. Control actions in corn are recommended when armyworms average between 1/2 and 3/4 inches and the entire field averages 35% infested plants or 50% or more defoliation is seen on damaged plants.

For information about corn pests, visit ["Insect Management Recommendations"](#).