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NebGuide

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Webworm Control in Sugarbeets

Arthur F. Hagen, Extension Entomologist

The sugarbeet webworm and the alfalfa webworm attack sugarbeets. Their life history, damage and control are similar. Frequent outbreaks have been reported in sugarbeets from both species, so that they are now generally listed only as "webworms."

Life History

Webworms overwinter as pupae in earthen cells 1 1/2 to 2 inches (3.8 to 5 cm) deep in the soil. The adults begin to emerge about the middle of April, and emergence continues until late May. The moth is various shades of gray, brown, and tan. These adults, about 1/2 inch (1.3 cm) long with white underwings, can be seen in beet fields during the day, and fly about when the plants are disturbed.

Because of the long period of emergence of the adults, all stages can usually be found in the fields. From 2 to 50 eggs are laid on the underside of beet leaves. They resemble overlapping fish scales and are difficult to find. The eggs hatch in about 5 days and the young larvae begin feeding. The early damage is not too noticeable. As the worms increase in size two or three larvae can destroy an entire plant.

Mature larvae are 1 to 1 1/2 inches (2.5 to 3.8 cm) long, dark colored with various markings of circles and stripes. The mature larvae enter the soil and pupate. The adults from these pupae emerge during the latter part of July or early August and begin the second generation.

Damage

Usually, the first generation is most destructive because the sugarbeets are small and may be completely destroyed. Lighter infestations will remove all the leaf surface except for the main veins. Lightly damaged beets may recover, but usually there is some loss in yield. The second generation injury is usually not as severe unless large populations are present. If severe damage is done by the second generation, the beets are unable to recover and sugar and tonnage yields are greatly reduced.

Control

Because of the explosive nature of webworm populations, if any webworms are found, fields should be watched closely. When two or three webworms are found per plant, control should be applied because only a portion of the actual infestation is usually observed. The following table shows what chemicals can be used.

Insecticide	Amount Formulation Per Acre (per hectare)	Amount Active Ingredient Per Acre (per hectare)	Days before harvest and other Restrictions
Dylox 80SP	1.25 lb. (1.4 kg)	1.0 lb. (1.13 kg)	28 days - 14 days if tops are not fed to livestock
Sevin Sprayable or Sevimol 4 (carbaryl)	2 lbs. (2.25 kg)	1.6 lbs. (1.8 kg)	14 days
Parathion 46% EC	1 pint (1.18 l)	0.5 lb. (.6 kg)	15 days - to be applied by trained applicators only.

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