



Vegetables

Corn Earworm

Pest Fact Sheet **18**

Introduction

The corn earworm, *Heliothis zea*, is considered one of the worst pests of sweet corn. It might go undetected until harvest time when it is often first discovered by the customer. It has a world-wide distribution and is a major problem in the south. The corn earworm is not only a pest of corn, but also of tomato and cotton, where it is known as the tomato fruitworm and the cotton bollworm, respectively.

Description

The corn earworm larvae vary in color; some individuals are green, some are pinkish-brown and some are nearly black. The larvae are very large, about 1½" long when full grown, with alternating light and dark stripes which run the length of the body. When viewed closely, the body has tufts of short bristles. The head capsule is an orange-yellow color and the legs are black.

The adult moth varies in color from creamy-yellow to an olive brown. There are irregular lines and spots on the moth; one of the spots characteristically shows through to the underside of the wing.



The eggs, which are laid singly on fresh corn silks, are shaped like a hemisphere and have ridges along their sides.

Life cycle

The corn earworm does not overwinter in New Hampshire. Adult moths fly north in the summer, with the first moths arriving here sometime between July 1 and August 15. Depending on weather conditions, many waves of corn earworm moths may come to New Hampshire throughout the summer.

The female moths lay their eggs singly, preferably on fresh corn silk. A single moth will lay 500 to 3000 eggs. The eggs hatch in 2-10 days and the larvae begin to feed on the silk. They stop feeding when the silk becomes dry, then move to the tip of the ear, where the larva feeds on the kernels for 2-4 weeks. After a 5th molt, the larva drops to the ground to pupate, emerging later as an adult moth. Late corn the most vulnerable, since it can be attacked by both local and migrating moths.

Control

Corn earworm control is not necessary on plantings or varieties maturing by mid to late July in New Hampshire. Begin applications of insecticides when moths arrive and when 25% of the ears show silk. Commercially available wire cone traps and lures can tell when earworms arrive in your fields and how abundant they are. Insecticides are directed at the fresh silk. Spray intervals vary with earworm moth abundance, and typically range from 3 to 7 days. Once silks have dried, insecticide application is no longer effective.

Consult your county Extension Educator (see county office telephone listing on reverse side) for specific pesticide recommendations.

Summary

Damaging stage	Larva
Plant part attacked	Ear
Overwintering stage	Does not overwinter in NH
Number of generations per year	1 and a partial 2nd
Time of year when damage is done	July to October
Number of applications per year	Zero to 3 per planting

UNH Cooperative Extension County Office Telephone Numbers

Belknap (603) 527-5475	Carroll (603) 539-3331	Cheshire (603) 352-4550	Coos (603) 788-4961	Grafton (603) 787-6944
Hillsborough Goffstown (603) 641-6060	Merrimack (603) 796-2151	Rockingham Brentwood, NH 03833 (603) 679-5616	Strafford (603) 749-4445	Sullivan (603) 863-9200

Stop! It is always the pesticide applicator's responsibility, by law, to read and follow all current label directions for the specific pesticide being used. If unsure of registration status of a particular pesticide product, contact the NH Division of Pesticide Control at (603) 271-3550. Store pesticides in their original containers in a locked cabinet or shed away from food. Dispose of unused pesticides or empty containers safely, according to NH regulations. If you suspect pesticide poisoning, call the New Hampshire Poison Control Center at 1-800-562-8236.



Alan T. Eaton
Extension Specialist, Entomology

Visit our website: ceinfo.unh.edu

UNH Cooperative Extension is an equal opportunity educator and employer.
UNH, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture and NH counties cooperating.

Revised 5/03