

Checking the Back Forty



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Insect pests on the horizon

Armyworm

There have been reports of armyworm moth flights in other states and we have been now picking them up in traps here in NY. This doesn't mean we have a lot of larvae feeding at the moment, more an indication that we are likely to see some damage and likely worth your time to scout fields. Mike Hunter a CCE counterpart in Northern NY first reported seeing small armyworms in uncut grass hay fields this week. We have since gone out and looked and also found small armyworms in grass hay fields. Though we don't usually think of using a sweep net on grass hay fields in this instance it worked well as it wasn't easy to find them on the ground during the day.

How many we found varied, in many fields there were few or none but other fields had 10 or more in the net. There aren't economic thresholds worked out for using a sweep net for this purpose so best this information can serve to tell us they are present. That fact that we are finding larvae and moths at the same time tells us there have been multiple flights and that we likely need to keep vigilant over the next few weeks as moths coming to the area now lay eggs.



*Armyworm photo courtesy of
 CCE Field Crop Specialist
 Mike Hunter*



*Armyworm in a sweep net in
 Herkimer County this week.*

Moths lay eggs in grasses so common crops to check are grass hay fields and pastures, small grains and corn in particular where grassy weeds or winter grains may have been present. Larvae hatch about a week later and develop over a 3 week period feeding mostly at night. Feeding takes place mostly on grasses but will include the leaves of other plants. Several years ago I saw where armyworms had taken about a ten foot wide swath of soybeans because they had exhausted the oat field right next to them. During the day the larvae will be under residue or debris on the soils surface or in the whorl of corn plants. If there are masses of larvae with no place to hide you may see flocks of birds feeding on them.

The thought of armyworm always seems to start wide spread panic so a reminder here is that I find fields every summer with some armyworm damage. I cannot emphasize enough given what we have seen so far there is reason to be vigilant so that they might be controlled if you find them on your farm.

Reference:

https://nysipm.cornell.edu/sites/nysipm.cornell.edu/files/shared/True_ArmywormNYSIPM.pdf

Black Cutworm

There have also been high numbers of Black Cutworm moths in traps in the state. Check corn fields for plants that are cutoff or have holes through the stem. A caution is birds trying pull corn plants out of the ground often will also clip off the top part of a young corn plant leaving a stubble. If birds have a tough time getting the seed out you will also notice a depressed area around the plant where they worked the plant over. You may actually see where the birds were successful at getting the seed leaving a seedling out of the ground and possibility of a seed hull left in the vicinity.

You are more likely to find cutworm damage in later planted corn fields that had weeds or cover crop, reduced or no tillage with residue and was possibly a soybean field last year. Low lying fields with considerable vegetation around them are also more attractive to moths. Larvae feed at night and hide in the ground during the day. You can often find them in the ground around plants they have been feeding on.



Corn seedling shoot clipped by birds

Reference:

<https://fieldcrops.cals.cornell.edu/corn/insects-corn/cutworms>

<https://extension.entm.purdue.edu/fieldcropsipm/insects/black-cutworms.php>

<https://ipm.missouri.edu/pestmonitoring/bcw/BCW.pdf>

Alfalfa weevil

With our alfalfa monitoring we have also been watching for signs of alfalfa weevil larvae feeding over the past few weeks. We have seen very little to no signs until this week when the leaf feeding showed up in one field.

If we are now only beginning to see feeding of the first cutting damage is likely to be minimal if you get it off in the next week or so. Any first cutting loss will likely come if you can't harvest or if you were planning to take the alfalfa for hay and holding off for better drying weather.

The scenario we are more likely to see damage for this year is taking the first cutting but finding alfalfa weevil feeding on the regrowth. If you harvest and don't find the field greening up in the next 5 to 7 days make sure you check the crowns for alfalfa weevil larvae. There is a good chance you will see alfalfa weevil larvae feeding on the new shoots.

If 50% of the new buds show signs of feeding an insecticide application may be necessary.

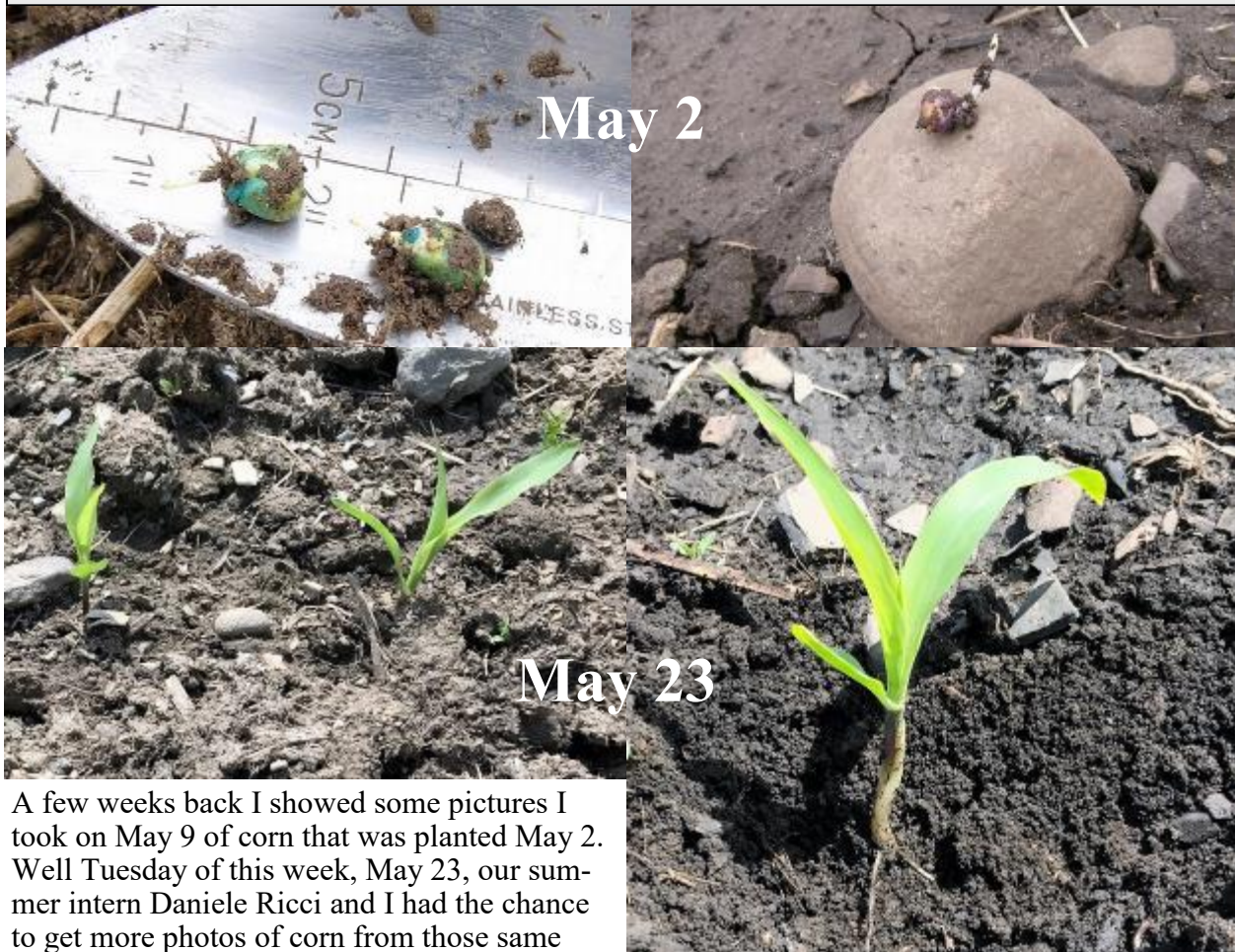


*Holes in leaves from alfalfa weevil feeding
Insert: Alfalfa weevil larvae: Green bodies with black heads and a white stripe down the back.*

References:

<https://ecommons.cornell.edu/bitstream/handle/1813/42375/mgmt-alfalfa-weevil-NYSIPM.pdf?sequence=1>

Remember that early planted corn...



A few weeks back I showed some pictures I took on May 9 of corn that was planted May 2. Well Tuesday of this week, May 23, our summer intern Daniele Ricci and I had the chance to get more photos of corn from those same fields. If these fields are representative of some of the earliest planted corn fields then corn planted on May 2 did not fair too badly. They are now V1 and looking healthy.

We did stand counts on both fields and they had plant populations of 30,000 and 33,000 respectively. Even some of the wetter, compacted areas seemed to fare better than to be expected. The fact that these were well drained Herkimer and Palatine soils certainly helped the plants stay out of standing water but therein is the lesson. Planting corn is risky but if it is May 2, the soils are well drained soils and soil moisture is dry enough you can be in the field with equipment then likely it is a day to plant corn. The goal isn't to have the earliest planted corn the goal is to have as much of the spring field work completed as timely as possible with a minimum of risk to the corn.

So with much concern over "corn rotting in the field" if you are staying out of poorly drained fields and not mudding in corn and compacting the field the risks under cold early May conditions are likely minimized.