

NNY Western Bean Cutworm Moth Trap Summary

By: Mike Hunter

Western Bean Cutworm is becoming a notable pest in field corn in New York State. Jefferson, Lewis and Franklin counties continue to have the highest WBC moth trap catches in the state each year. Remember that WBC is a pest of field corn, sweet corn and dry beans. Its presence in NYS was confirmed in 2009 and we have been monitoring its distribution throughout NNY since 2010. The Western Bean Cutworm has the potential to soon become the number one pest of field corn in New York State.

The purpose of these traps are deployed to monitor moth presence and determine the peak flight. We cannot use trap counts to determine when a field should be sprayed with an insecticide. Traps help us identify fields at risk and when scouting should take place. Management of the WBC is based on egg masses found on the leaves. It is also important to note that trap counts do not correlate to the amount of WBC damage to expect in the corn field. In fact, in 2016, we monitored a site that only caught 190 WBC moths for the entire season and that particular field had 18.75% of the ears with WBC feeding damage.

There were 52 WBC traps located in 27 NYS counties in 2017. Twenty seven WBC traps were monitored weekly in corn fields in NNY (Jefferson, Lewis, St. Lawrence, Franklin, Clinton, Essex). We caught a record number of WBC moths this season. The 27 WBC traps in NNY caught 23,658 total moths, averaging 876 moths per trap. To illustrate how much of a Western Bean Cutworm “hotspot” we are in NNY, the other 25 WBC traps located throughout NYS caught a total of 5,915 moths, averaging 236 moths per trap. The peak WBC moth flight in NNY occurred the first week in August (see graph).

Midwestern US entomologists suggest monitoring for the presence WBC egg masses once trap counts reach 100 moths. We focus our scouting on fields that are in the pretassel or newly tasseling corn as the moths prefer these corn growth stages for egg laying. The action threshold used for WBC in field corn is using a cumulative counts. Once we reach 5% of egg masses and/or small larva on the corn plants an insecticide application is warranted. This season two corn fields in Jefferson County were found to be over threshold and an insecticide application was made. These were the first known WBC treatments in field corn in the state.

We would also like to thank Joe Lawrence with PRO-DAIRY, Harry Fefee with CCE Franklin County, Mike Davis, Farm Manager, Willsboro Research Farm and Mike Kiechle, a Jefferson County dairy farmer for their assistance with weekly reporting of WBC trap catches.

Western Bean Cutworm populations continue to increase in NYS each year. This is a corn pest that needs to be monitored closely to prevent corn yield and quality losses in the future. If you have any questions or would like more information about Western Bean Cutworm please contact North Country Regional Ag Team Regional Field Crop Specialists, Mike Hunter and Kitty O’Neil.