



Pest e-alerts



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Vol. 12, No. 20

<http://entopl.okstate.edu/Pddl/>

Jun 3, 2013

Chinch Bug Management in Sorghum

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I received my first reports of chinch bugs infesting sorghum. Adult chinch bugs overwinter in bunch grasses and move into wheat in late winter to early spring. They remain in the wheat until it matures, and then migrate to nearby corn or sorghum fields, usually as partially grown nymphs.

Adult chinch bugs measure 3/16 inches with a black with a white "X" on their back. Nymphs are smaller and range in color from red to brown white band across their back. They typically feed on the lower leaves between the leaf blade and sheath, or below ground if there are cracks that provide access below the soil surface. They feed by sucking plant



juices and appear to inject a toxic substance contained in their saliva. Injury symptoms on the feeding site show up as reddish spots, and heavily infested plants may wilt, look drought stricken or injured by frost. Smaller plants are more vulnerable to injury, and sorghum is more susceptible to injury than corn. As few as 2-3 chinch bugs can kill a seedling sorghum plant, but it will take 5-10 bugs per plant to kill larger plants.

There are several options for control of chinch bugs. Sorghum seed treated with an insecticide such as Cruiser® or Poncho® insecticide will “slow them down” for about three weeks and give the sorghum a head start.



For rescue management of chinch bugs, an insecticide can be applied as a border treatment or full field treatment. If the chinch bugs are moving in from a mature wheat field, consider a border treatment. The insecticide should be applied in a 30-60 foot strip along the boundary between the two crops, it may take more than one application, so continue to monitor and spray (if needed) until the migration stops. If the infestation occurs throughout the field, it should all be treated.

With either method, ground applications using 20 to 30 gallons of water per acre and directed at the base of the plant provide vastly superior control compared to aerial applications. Consider banding the spray over the row. Several products are registered for control of chinch bug and are listed in [EPP-7170 “Management of Insect and Mite Pests in Sorghum”](#) which can be obtained from your local County Extension Office.

Corn Earworm Search for a New Name.....Canola Podworm?

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Fig 1. Corn earworms on canola. Photos courtesy of Josh Bushong, Oklahoma State University

The canola mantra continues: “we learn something new about canola every year”. This year is no exception on the insect front. I received a picture of a caterpillar from Josh Bushong that was chewing on the canola pods just like last year’s insect of the year, the variegated cutworm (Figure 1). It turns out that it was a corn earworm and Josh said there were several fields that were infested.

The corn earworm is known by many names: corn earworm, sorghum headworm, cotton bollworm, tomato fruitworm, soybean podworm. It appears that it is not satisfied with these names, but wants to add another (the canola podworm?). In any case, canola growers need to be aware of its new appetite for canola pods.

The caterpillar comes in varied colors (green, yellow, brown, or pinkish with a darker longitudinal stripe, and full grown larvae reach one inch long. (Figure 2). The larva grows through 4-6 instars in 4-6 weeks.

It is very important to check the field before deciding to spray and check several locations in the field to get an accurate assessment of the infestation. Look for damage signs (damaged pods) as well as the caterpillars themselves. We developed a guesstimate for a treatment threshold for variegated cutworms, and I figured that the corn earworm is similar in size and appetite to a variegated cutworm so I suggest we use 2 or more corn earworms per square foot as a treatment threshold.



Fig 2. Corn earworm (podworm) variations in color. Photo from R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company Slide Set, R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company, Bugwood.org

The canola canopy is very thick, making it difficult to penetrate with an insecticide spray unless gallonage is increased. On the bright side, corn earworms seem to be most interested in feeding on the pods in the upper canopy. The selection of an insecticide should be made both on cost and pre-harvest interval (PHI). Most effective insecticides have a pre-harvest interval of from 7-35 days. If canola is close to harvest, avoid insecticides with a long PHI. Current recommendations for control of cutworms in canola are listed in page 161 of E-832, 2013 OSU Extension Agents' Handbook of Insect, Plant Disease, and Weed Control or [CR-7667, Management of Insect and Mite Pests in Canola](#).

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Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Robert E. Whitson, Director of Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma. This publication is printed and issued by Oklahoma State University as authorized by the Vice President, Dean, and Director of the Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural.