

Crops

Beetles: A wilt warning

By CANDACE POLLOCK

SOUTHERN Ohio's corn crop may face a high risk of Stewart's bacterial wilt and leaf blight this growing season. The disease is caused by a bacterium carried and spread by adult flea beetles.

Based on the flea beetle index conducted by Ohio State University Extension and Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center specialists this winter, populations of the insect are predicted to be high in southern Ohio, and low to moderate in northern and west-central Ohio. As a result, corn in southern counties could be at a greater risk for the disease.

"The occurrence of Stewart's bacterial disease is totally dependent on the level of bacteria-carrying flea beetle survival over the winter," says Ron Hammond, an OSU Extension entomologist. "For many years, the winter temperatures have been used to predict the risk of Stewart's disease because higher populations of the flea beetle survive during mild winters than during cold winters."

New pattern

The flea beetle index is calculated as the sum of the average temperatures of December, January and February. Index values less than 90 indicate a negligible disease threat, 90 to 95 indicates low to moderate levels, 95 to 100 indicates moderate to severe, and values over 100 indicate a severe disease threat.

The results covered six locations:

Hoytville = value of 84.4

Wooster = value of 88.4

Ashtabula = value 87.4

South Charleston = value of 90.4

Jackson = value of 99.7

Piketon = value of 100.3

"These values are very similar to those from last winter. However, when comparing the temperatures last year to the past three months, we see a very different picture," says Pierce Paul, a plant pathologist with the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center.

"Last year," says Paul, "December and January were relatively warm, while February was an extremely cold month. This year, these three months have, on average, been more typical of the temperatures one would expect, without any month being neither extremely warm nor cold."

Can't miss it

The message for growers: Scout for flea beetles this spring, especially if you are planting a hybrid that is susceptible to Stewart's wilt.

"Beetles survive in the soil and emerge when soil temperatures warm to about 65 degrees F. The flea beetle is a small, black, shiny insect. Once you know it, you can't miss it," adds Paul. "Contact your OSU Extension county office if you have questions or need treatment recommendations."

For those who want to take preventive action against the beetle, commercially applied insecticide seed treatments Cruiser and Poncho or the grower-applied products Concur and Latitude are labeled for flea beetle control.

Stewart's wilt is characterized by

Key Points

- Stewart's wilt could be a problem in southern Ohio.
- Scouting for flea beetles is the key to tracking the disease.
- The disease can be seen on seedlings and leaves.

two major disease phases. One phase is seedling blight. Young plants develop

pale green to yellowish streaks on the leaves. These young plants usually wilt and die, and those that survive are stunted and usually produce no ears.

The other phase is the leaf blight stage, recognized as long, pale green streaks on leaves. As the streaks enlarge, portions turn pale yellow and eventually become brown. Streaks may run the entire length of the leaf. A few characteristic lesions may be seen early in the season, but numerous lesions

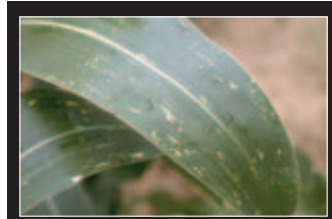


PHOTO BY PAT LIPP

SEE SIGNS: This corn is showing Stewart's bacterial leaf blight and corn flea beetle feeding injury.

are usually not detected until after tassel.

Pollock writes for OSU Extension.

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