

# Spot-check to uncover crucial rootworm clues

By TOM J. BECHMAN

**M**AYBE your buddies won't get all that excited if you tell them your "fishing trip" is a little closer to home than Canada. In fact, it's going to be in your field, "fishing" for rootworm larvae. Exciting? Probably not. But it could be informative and profitable.

"We've often said you ought to start looking for rootworm larvae when you see the first lightning bugs," explains Lance Murrell, independent crops consultant and CCA in Idaville in northwestern Indiana. "That's generally about when rootworm larvae begin to hatch."

Depending on the weather during the early part of the growing season, it's typically about the first week of June. However, within the past few years, that date has varied from around May 20 to June 10.

"It's always wise to spot-check," Murrell says. "You'll want to know how your triple-

## Key Points

- Check performance of corn rootworm control options.
- Compare control in triple-stack hybrids vs. refuge areas.
- As larvae mature, damage can progress from minor to major.

stack hybrids are performing. And you'll want to know what's going on in refuge areas."

Remember that if you opt for rootworm-protected corn, at least 20% of your acreage in each field must be conventional refuge acres. Especially if you're relying upon a seed treatment to protect those areas, you'll want to dig and scout carefully, Murrell says.

Poncho 250 is not labeled for rootworm control. Poncho 1250 can handle a moderate infestation, but don't expect it to stop a severe outbreak.

## How to inspect roots

Larval hatch is closely related to soil temperatures, notes

Greg Bossaer, White County, Ind., Extension educator and CCA. It usually occurs over a three- to four-week period.

"It's always a good idea to check the performance of your corn rootworm control option sometime in June," he says. "If there's a need, you may still be able to apply a soil insecticide at cultivation."

Here's how Bossaer recommends you inspect your corn roots:

■ Use a shovel and carefully lift the entire root mass. Place it on a piece of dark cloth or dark-colored paper. Slowly break away soil.

■ You're looking for tunneling, scarring and pruning, he notes. At the same time, keep an eye out for small, slender white rootworm larvae. Repeat this procedure in 10 areas of the field.

■ If you find two or more larvae per plant prior to cultivation time, consider a cultivation treatment, he suggests.

Understanding the root-



**CHEWED UP:** This plant shows signs of rootworm feeding. You won't know what's happening unless you dig.

worm's life cycle could put you in a better position to both scout for potential damage and control the pest. George Watters, a CCA and agronomist with Agrilience LLC, Noblesville, Ind., and Croplan Genetics, says it's important to note that as larvae mature, damage can progress from minor root tunneling to major devastation. Even brace roots are subject to rootworm feeding. Those are the fields that become prone to lodging.

Larvae will eventually pupate, Watters says, but your worries aren't over. They emerge as adult beetles and start feeding. Their ability to

feed in soybean fields, at least amongst some variants, is why corn and soybean rotation is no longer a surefire weapon against rootworm damage in much of Indiana and Illinois.

Rootworm beetles are one of two major pests that clip silks. Japanese beetles can also cut silks. If silks are clipped within ½ inch, beetles are still present, and corn is still pollinating, spraying may prevent yield loss. Cases of severe silk clipping result in ears with few kernels.

Adults eventually deposit eggs in the soil, usually in August through early September.

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