

Tillage events set for winter

THE 2009 Illinois Tillage Seminars will focus on the critical role of tillage. The seminar, titled "Tillage, Technology and Environmental Stewardship," is set for Jan. 27 in Bloomington, Jan. 28 in Princeton and Jan. 29 in Malta.

The program will feature the latest technology and environmental stewardship associated with adopting a no-till or strip-till farming system. Presenters will provide hands-on recommendations and information.

Seating is limited, so preregistration is necessary one week prior to the program. The cost is \$20, which covers materials and a noon luncheon.

A grant for the Illinois Department of Agriculture is providing partial support for the program.

Specific seminar topics include state cost-share and technical assistance programs, the 2008 Farm Bill conservation payments, tillage's role in carbon sequestration, climate's impact on crops, the long-term effects of no-till/strip-till, no-till planter setup, and managing weeds in a no-till/strip-till system.

Jan. 27 Interstate Center, Bloomington

Located at 2301 W. Market St. on the west edge of Bloomington-Normal. Take Interstate 55/74 to Exit 160; go West on Illinois Route 9 for three-quarters of a mile; turn right into the Interstate Center.

Jan. 28 The Galleria, Princeton

Located at 1659 N. Main St., on the north edge of Princeton. From Interstate 80, take Exit 56 onto Illinois Route 26 and go half a mile south into Princeton, on the east side of the road.

Jan. 29 Kishwaukee College, Malta

Kishwaukee College is located at 21193 Malta Road in Malta at the corner of Illinois Route 38 and Malta Rd. From Interstate 39, go east on Illinois Route 38 for seven miles or from DeKalb, go five miles west on Illinois Route 38.

Source: University of Illinois

■ For more information, call Bob Frazee, University of Illinois, at 309-694-7401, ext. 226.

Pest forecast puzzle

By JOSH FLINT

EACH year around this time, Kevin Steffey is continually asked, "What insects will be a problem next year?"

Early in his career, Steffey, an entomologist at the University of Illinois, decided to quit answering that question. "With experience came the realization that predicting insect populations is not wise," he notes.

Many farmers think next year's insect populations hinge on the severity of winter. Steffey insists it's not that easy. Since insect populations are at the mercy of Mother Nature, any insect prediction has to involve a weather prediction.

"Insect populations sometimes respond to winter weather," he adds. "It's not a one plus one equals two sort of thing. It gets more complex than that."

Insects that overwinter in the field are typically adapted to the Illinois cold. Therefore, growing-season weather typically plays a larger part in insect survival, Steffey notes.

Take the western corn rootworm for example. Steffey says the insect is active for about two to three months out of the year. The rootworm overwinters as an egg in the soil.

In order to kill rootworm

Key Points

- Hard winter doesn't necessarily mean fewer insects.
- Most native insects are adapted to cold temperatures.
- Foreign pests are susceptible to the cold.

eggs, Steffey says soil temperatures need to be in the teens for four to six weeks. This year, corn rootworms didn't wreak as much havoc as past years. Saturated soils from the end of May to mid-June killed off many of the freshly hatched larvae, Steffey points out.

The wireworm is another Illinois native that's fairly immune to the winter cold. Kevin Black, Growmark's insect/plant disease technical manager, explains wireworms move very easily through the soil. In a cold snap, they simply burrow deeper. "I've never known winter conditions to kill off wireworms," notes Black.

Foreign predictions

In the case of Japanese beetles, Black says a hard winter without snow cover can thin the population. "Since it's not a native insect, it just does not have the tolerance to cold," Black explains.

During a cold snap, snow cover and excessive crop res-

idue can act as insulators, Steffey explains. Black says temperatures may need to be around 10 degrees F for several days to kill off Japanese beetles.

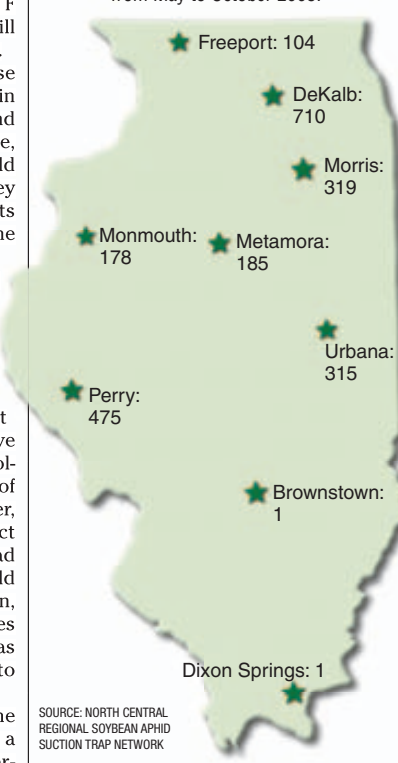
This year, Japanese beetles were intense in various spots around the state. Therefore, any winterkill would be welcome. Steffey heard specific reports of high activity in the Springfield area.

Japanese beetles' hunger for silks can cause significant stress for farmers. But, several experts have indicated it requires a significant population of active beetles to hinder pollination as a result of silk clipping. However, their defoliation effect in soybeans can lead to significant yield loss. For this reason, Steffey classifies Japanese beetles as more of a nuisance to soybeans.

Even though the Japanese beetle is a foreign pest, it overwinters in Illinois. Other insects, such as the armyworm, the potato leafhopper and the

Soybean aphid hot spots

Numbers represent winged aphid captures from May to October 2008.



SOURCE: NORTH CENTRAL REGIONAL SOYBEAN APHID SUCTION TRAP NETWORK

black cutworm, move in each growing season for a crop smorgasbord.

Aphids break their pattern

SINCE the soybean aphid first surfaced in Illinois in 2000, the insect has been most damaging during odd-numbered years.

Kevin Steffey, a University of Illinois entomologist, pinpoints 2003 as one of the worst on record for soybean aphids in the Midwest. This year, the soybean aphid broke its odd-year pattern, and many Northern farmers were hit especially hard.

According to Steffey, affected states included Minnesota, the Dakotas, Nebraska, southern Wisconsin, Iowa and northern Illinois.

"From the data I saw, 2008 may have surpassed 2003 in many parts of the Midwest," he adds. "In Illinois, it was primarily a problem for farmers north of Bloomington."

This year, Steffey observed significant infestations in Stephenson County. Average densities in 10 fields ranged from 50 to 1,037 aphids per plant.

The every-other-year pattern follows the ebb and flow of the aphid's principal predator, the multicolored Asian lady beetle. In the past, a high number of winged soybean aphid captures in the fall pointed to an aphid outbreak the following year. During the outbreak year's growing season, the Asian lady beetle population grows as it feeds on aphids.

Once the Asian lady beetle catches up late in the growing season, the suction traps begin to register lower numbers of winged soybean aphids in the fall. The next growing season (an even year) typically has fewer aphids.

Since the cycle was broken, many growers are wondering what 2009 holds. Kevin Black, Growmark's insect/plant disease technical manager, thinks 2009 will be another outbreak year. However, he says the Indian summer temperatures of late October encouraged increased Asian lady beetle activity. Therefore, farmers will have to wait until next year to see how big of a bite they took out of the aphid population.

What will the weather be like?

JIM Angel, state climatologist, says the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration calls for an increased chance of above-normal temperatures this winter.

"There is no El Niño or La Niña event in the Pacific, so NOAA's only guidance is the trend of the past 10 years towards milder winters," Angel adds.

The past decade's trend works well, unless you count last winter. However, Angel says, "The good news is, it's less likely to have a repeat of last winter just because the La Niña episode from last winter is gone."

For good measure, Angel tossed in the Farmer's Almanac forecast: frigid, wet, wild, snowy.

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POSTMASTER: Send address corrections to *Prairie Farmer*, 255 38th Ave., Suite P, St. Charles, IL 60174.

Contact us:

Executive Editor: Frank Holdmeyer
fholdmeyer@farmprogress.com
1301 E. Mound Rd., Decatur, IL 62526
Phone: 217-877-9070 Fax: 217-877-9695

Associate Editor: Josh Flint
Field Editor: Holly Spangler
Contributing Editors: Tom J. Bechman, Dan Crummett, Alan Newport, John Otte, Arlan Suderman, Lon Tonneson and John Vogel
Corporate Editorial Director: Willie Vogt

Sales: Jeff Smith, 217-877-1662

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