

# Squeeze more profit from insect control

By RICHARD DAVIS

**G**ROWERS can cut some of their insect-control costs in ways that can significantly boost their bottom line, says Sterling Southern, North Carolina State University entomologist.

The best place to start is with cultural practices that can reduce the possibility of damaging insect populations, he says. These include such practices as stalk and root destruction, sticking to the recommended rates of fertilizer, and refraining from over-fertilization, especially with nitrogen, early topping and sanitation practices.

"These are all very important in reducing the chance that you are going to have an insect problem," Southern says. "And more importantly, most of these are cheap. Some of them will even save you money."

"You're certainly not saving money when you use unneeded N, for example, and topping late cuts yields," he says.

### Key Points

- Cultural practices are cheapest forms of insect control.
- Use insect-control savings to help ease the profit crunch.
- Match new product rates to your insect problems.

### Using your biology

Free biological control offers a great economical tool. This is primarily the use of available beneficial insects. If you learn to use them and don't inadvertently kill them, beneficial insects can play an important role in reducing the probability or possibility of an insect problem.

### Remedial vs. systemic

Another opportunity for containing costs is in the choice of remedial vs. systemic control.

"It is clear that we can take a remedial, wait-and-see approach, treat at threshold with appropriate chemicals and do just as good a job as we can by taking a preventive approach,"

Southern says. "We've done it in test after test, year after year. We also know that typically this is cheaper."

On the other hand, some of the new products now available like Admire and Platinum (and even some of the older products, Southern notes) have benefits that can add up.

"They typically control more than one pest," he says. "Some of them — like Admire and Platinum — can have an impact on tomato spotted wilt virus and wireworms, as well as on the leaf-eating insects that we are targeting."

One way to save money using some of these products is to keep the systemic rates as low as possible for the pest you want to control. Southern has tested Admire 2F at 1 ounce per 1,000 plants and Platinum as low as 0.5 ounce for flea beetles and aphids, and he found the products performed very well in those tests. He notes that when growers have a break in aphid control, "it is usually right at topping and



**SAVE MONEY:** North Carolina State University entomologist Sterling Southern says tobacco growers can squeeze more out of insect-control products and techniques.

one over-the-top treatment will take care of it.

"However, if you are looking for wireworm control, you probably will need to bump the rate up a little bit and go up to a 1-ounce rate for Platinum and up to a 0.8-ounce rate for Admire Pro [1.4 ounce for Admire 2F]," he says. "If you are looking for spotted wilt suppression, you're going to have to go higher than that. With Admire 2F you'll need 1.8 ounces (or 0.8 ounce of Admire Pro) and Platinum at 1.3 ounces."

Southern says producers can avoid multiple soil-applied applications.

"For example, if you are using Admire or Platinum at above the lowest rates, I don't think most growers will need to put in another broadcast material for wireworms," he says.

"If you are already using one of the better systemic insecticides, there is no advantage in using a second. You increase the cost and the chance of crop damage with little chance of better control."

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