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Sweet Corn Insect Pests
Michigan State University
Cooperative Extension Service
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May 1976
2 pages

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No. 87

Sweet Corn Insect Pests

Extension Bulletin E-967, May 1976

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Seed corn maggots overwinter as small brown pupae in the soil. (1) Adult flies (¼-inch long, dusty-brown color) emerge in mid- to late-May. They are attracted to soils which are high in decomposing organic matter, such as plowed down winter cover crops or animal manure. The eggs are laid on, or just under, the soil surface and hatch in a few days. The maggots begin to feed on the decomposing organic matter in the soil. (2) Seeds which are planted in such soils are often attacked before they sprout or shortly thereafter. This causes substantial loss in stand. There are 3 or more generations per year. The generations emerging after late June are of less importance since most annual plants are well established by this time.

European corn borers overwinter as larvae in corn stalks. (3) Adult moths emerge in late-May and begin laying eggs. (4) Eggs hatch in about 4 days and (5) larvae begin to feed on the leaves. Within a few days, they bore into the stalk which may result in some (6) tassels breaking over, or if ears are formed, the larvae may bore out from the stalk and enter the ear from the butt end. In some cases, the larvae may go from the leaves directly to the (7) ears where they begin to bore. There are two generations per year. Adult activity of the first generation usually peaks between June 10 to 20 and the second generation usually peaks between August 15 to 25. (See graph at right.)

The corn earworm does not overwinter in Michigan. (8) The moths migrate in from the south; usually arriving in mid-August. The adults are attracted to green silks for egg laying.

(9, arrow) Eggs are laid singly on the silks and they hatch in 4 to 5 days and (10) the larvae enter the tip of the ear. For this reason, corn earworm damage is usually at the tip of the ear. Corn earworms are present in Michigan from mid-August until frost.

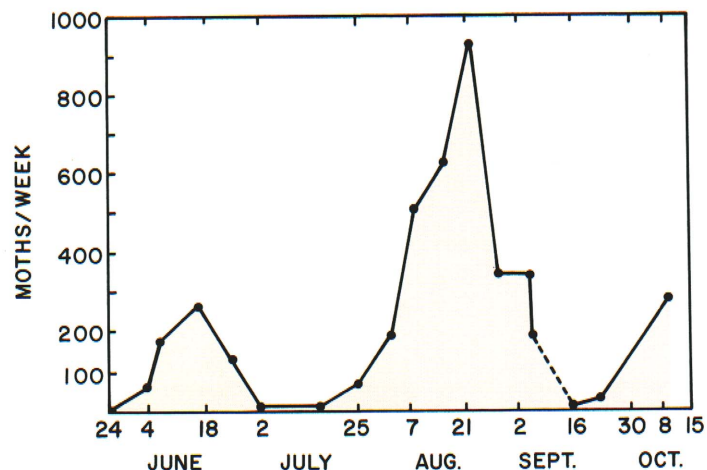
(11) Corn leaf aphids (1/16-inch long and bluish-green in color) are generally found in the whorl or tassel area. They produce large quantities of honeydew which is high in sugars and on which sooty mold develops. The aphids are generally not important except for the honeydew. This honeydew and sooty mold often makes the corn unsalable for fresh market. More importantly, the honeydew attracts adult corn earworms for egg laying. Corn leaf aphids first appear in mid-June and there may be 10 to 12 generations during the remainder of the summer.

(12) Sap beetles (¼-inch long, black with 4 cream-colored spots on the back) are sometimes a problem in

sweet corn. These beetles are attracted to all kinds of ripening or rotting fruits or fermenting plant sap. Hence, the sap beetles gather in great numbers anywhere there is injury to the plant. The damage usually occurs after that of a primary pest, such as European corn borer, corn earworm, or even birds. Hence, sap beetles are secondary invaders and can be kept to a minimum by keeping the fields free from damage from the primary pests.

* * *

For chemical control recommendations, homeowners should consult Extension Bulletin E-760(b), "Home Vegetable Garden Insect and Disease Control," Single Copies are free to Michigan residents from your County Cooperative Extension Office or you may write to the Michigan State University Bulletin Office, P.O. Box 231, East Lansing, MI 48824.



European corn borer adult flight, 1973—Lenawee Co., MI.

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1) Seed corn maggot—adult



2) Seed corn maggot in corn seed



3) European corn borer—adults



4) European corn borer—egg mass on pepper.



5) European corn borer larva (arrow) and damage to corn leaf



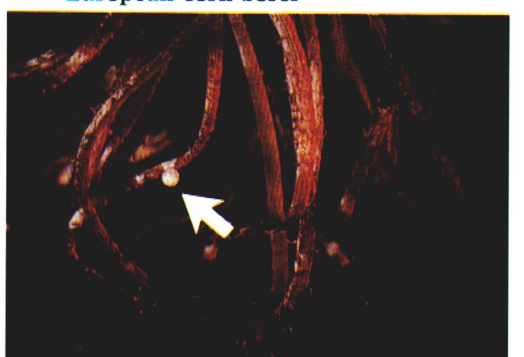
6) Broken tassel due to European corn borer



7) European corn borer in ear; entry hole—inset



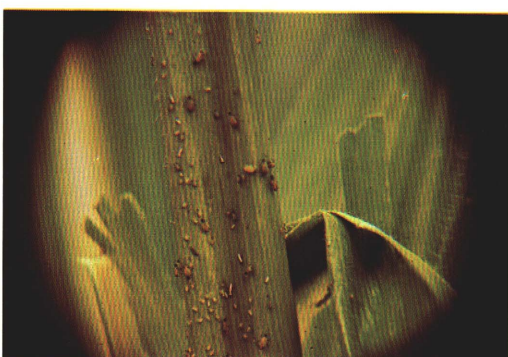
8) Corn earworm—adult



9) Corn earworm—egg (arrow)



10) Corn earworm—larva



11) Corn leaf aphids



12) Sap beetle—adult