



Corn blotch leafminer in Michigan

Chris DiFonzo, PhD, MSU Department of Entomology

Each year I receive several calls about leafminers in corn. The corn blotch leafminer (CBL) adult is a small, pretty fly which lays eggs on the corn leaf. The larvae hatch and tunnel into leaves, feeding (mining) within the leaf itself. The mines are transparent and grow in size as the larvae get bigger. In heavily infested fields, the corn leaves appear to be white from all of the mining activity. For those of you who work with beets, the damage is similar to that from spinach leafminer.

CBL is present every season, but in some locations and years it is numerous enough to draw attention. However, there is little you can do about this pest. First, damage is usually thought to be non-economic - i.e. the corn compensates for the damage by the end of the season. Second, insecticides cannot reach the maggots, since they are safely protected within the leaf itself. Finally, the maggots are attacked by a wasp that can sting the larvae through the leaf surface. Often, a CBL infestation is eventually controlled by this wasp.

Yield loss is not well-defined, and there are no thresholds for CBL. The University of Nebraska has a short web-based bulletin on CBL at <http://www.ianr.unl.edu/pubs/insects/nf374.htm>, one of the few information sources on this insect. This bulletin uses loss from hail damaged to estimate loss from CBL. With 50 percent leaf loss (from mines in this case), only a two percent yield loss is expected in 7-leaf corn, and a six percent loss in 10-leaf corn. However, yield loss estimates are not really helpful to make a control decision. Larvae are protected within the mine from insecticide sprays, therefore, spraying is not recommended. The good news is as corn matures, the leaf surface toughens and plant injury from CBL is less.

There are also CBL pictures at: <http://entomology.unl.edu/fldcrops/cornpestkey/corn-blotch.htm>

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