

Drought Lightens Insect Pressure

Pests Took A Beating From The Dry Weather In 2007



Dr. Scott Stewart, Cotton IPM Specialist at the West Tennessee Research and Education Center in Jackson, Tenn, comments that 2007 was the lightest pest year since 2002.

Photo by John LaRose

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L year was a rather light insect year in Tennessee, according to Dr. Scott Stewart, cotton IPM specialist at the West Tennessee Research and Education Center in Jackson, Tenn.

"With the drought, we were lucky we didn't have to spend a lot of money on insect control," he said. "We had some late season plant bugs and stink bugs in cotton and soybeans, but the reality of the situation is, with the drought and the dry weather, insects were not a very big factor. It has been probably the lightest pest year across the whole range of crops since I came here in 2002."

Despite that, 2007 was a big year for southwestern corn borer. Corn borers were a big problem last year in the non Bt corn, particularly in the northern counties.

"We certainly recommend that farmers plant at least part of their acreage in Bt corn varieties this year," he said.

There is a restriction in most counties of Tennessee that only 50 percent of a farmer's acres can be planted to Bt corn. In the areas where there's a lot of corn borers, Stewart recommends that farmers plant this maximum.

"Bt corn is very effective at controlling corn borers," he said.

However, last year bollworms, or corn earworms, were almost non-existent in cotton.

"We did have a lot of thrips early in the season," Stewart said. "We also had treatment level populations of plant bugs or stink bugs on

some acres. They certainly weren't blow out or very high numbers."

Boll weevil essentially has become a non pest for farmers in Tennessee because of the eradication program.

"Bollworm is our number one caterpillar pest," he added. "Last year a couple of things happened in our cotton. I think the first thing is the cotton was drought stricken and matured early, prior to the bollworm flight. However, the bollworm flight was also a little later. We had a big freeze at Easter that killed off a lot of our corn and we had to replant it. Many bollworms develop in the ears of corn, and because the corn was late, our bollworms were late too. Our cotton was early, so we ended up missing that bollworm flight."

That was unusual. Normally, in late July or early August there is a good sized bollworm flight and many acres need treatment.

"Last year we hardly treated any," he said.

Soybeans also were hurt badly by the drought. The late fields that caught a rain shower or were irrigated were bug havens at the end of the year.

"We had stink bugs concentrating in those fields, but most of the early maturing beans had few insect problems," Stewart said. "What often happens is stink bugs will move from corn as it starts to mature and infest nearby cotton or soybean fields. Very often you will see them concentrated right along the edges of fields and this is something we need to watch."

In a typical year the corn would mature earlier and the stink bugs would show up earlier in the cotton and soybeans. Δ