

Indiana Snow Cover Aided Western Bean Cutworm

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by Andy Eubank

A Purdue University Extension entomologist has mixed news about western bean cutworm this season. The pest has been damaging corn fields in northwest Indiana and that damage reached a peak last year. The good news is there are successful ways to deal with it, but the long, cold winter likely didn't affect the pest's overwintering.

[Christian Krupke](#) says snow has been the problem. He told HAT, That provides an insulating blanket for these larvae that are about five to eight inches deep in the soil, and it keeps those temperatures fairly moderate by winter standards. So we would expect overwintering success to be quite good versus a winter where you didn't have as much snow. We've talked to some producers up there where western bean cutworm was very heavy last year, and they've said they've had very few days without snow on the ground.

Western bean cutworm favors areas with sandy soils, and lots of no-till and continuous corn. Those conditions are predominant in the western half of the northern third of Indiana, and Krupke says they expect to see high numbers of the pest in those areas again this year.

There is no real reason why we wouldn't see lots of western bean cutworm in those areas and continuing on into other areas of the state as well, he said. We saw it throughout the state, down as far as south of Indianapolis, but of course the northern part of the state is where more of the agricultural land is, so we sampled more intensively up there. But any grower in Indiana could see moths flying and laying eggs.

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But the good news is the treatability of western bean cutworm. Some Bt corn hybrids are effective at western bean cutworm control. Scouting fields in late June through the first couple of weeks of July also works well.

Krupke explained those scouting are basically looking for egg masses on plants, and once you hit five percent of the plants having an egg mass, that's the treatment threshold. Then you would treat the corn with a pyrethroid insecticide.

That insecticide has 100% control over the pest when applied at the right time.

Damage can be substantial, with one caterpillar per ear of corn in a field causing up to 4-5 bushels per acre yield loss.

There is more information at the Purdue Extension [corn insects scouting page](#), and listen to more with Christian Krupke at the [HAT blog, hatchat.net](#).

(Photo from Purdue Department of Entomology)