

TIMELY INFORMATION

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Sugarcane beetle is active in Alabama

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This is an alert about a sporadic insect pest of sweet corn and sugarcane that has been reported twice in May of 2009 from two northern counties of Alabama (map on left). This insect is called the sugarcane beetle, *Euethola rugiceps*, belongs to the family Scarabaeidae (i.e., scarab beetles) and was found under sweet corn plants. Adult beetle is uniformly black insect with spiny legs and few longitudinal lines on the hardened forewing as seen from the top (see picture). Although this beetle has no distinctive pattern of occurrence, crop damage could be severe in some cases due to late diagnosis. Larvae feed on corn roots similar to corn rootworms but larval feeding is nonthreatening in case of the sugarcane beetle. Main problem are the adult beetles that feed just below the soil surface at the base of sweet corn plants

creating holes and initiating stalk rot. In recent detections, seedling corn was attacked in straight rows (see picture below); it appears that beetles feed at the base of plants at the soil line and then follow cracks in soil to the next plant. Changes in crop rotation and cultivation practices may be a reason for development of some sugarcane beetle “hot-spots”. Corn close to sod fields is most vulnerable to attack and there is little producers can do to alleviate the situation in the current year. At present, there are no insecticides registered in sweet corn in Alabama to control this pest. Some registered products, like synthetic pyrethroids, require thorough coverage at high application rate with no guarantees on treatment success. At-planting insecticidal treatments (chlorpyrifos, terbufos, and bifenthrin) may provide some suppression in following years. Integrated pest management practices like avoiding sweet corn production fields near sod fields, early planting of vigorous corn hybrids may provide some relief, and insecticide rotation for heavily infested areas can help reduce population buildup. It is appropriate to consult an Extension Agent or a crop advisor before you apply any restricted use insecticides because application timing and rates without proper assessment could be expensive. For benefiting farmers, a sugarcane beetle tracker has been added to the Alabama IPM Insect Monitoring Program (https://sites.aces.edu/group/commhort/vegetable/Vegetable/alabama_IPM_trap_network.aspx).



Sugarcane beetle identification and crop injury symptoms as seen in Alabama, 2009. Pictures by Dan

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