

June 20, 2012 ALERT

Armyworms Feasting On GRASS Field-Crop Leaves throughout Northern New York

by Cornell Cooperative Extension NNY-Region Field-Crops Specialist Paul Peterson

The **true ('common') armyworm** (as opposed to the *fall*-armyworm 'version') has been reported all across the North Country (Clinton, Essex, Franklin, Jefferson, Lewis and St. Lawrence Counties) of New York during the last couple weeks; mostly in mature 1st-crop grass-dominant hayfields, but also in young corn no-tilled into grass stubble and 2nd-crop grass-forage re-growth.

Within the last two weeks, 'cousins' of these true-armyworm larvae have caused significant feeding damage in grass-dominant hay, winter-wheat, and young corn in western New York; and more recently in Jefferson County as well.

True-armyworm eggs are laid in grassy areas by moths blown north by strong southerly winds in late spring (i.e., they don't overwinter here). Larvae grow to over 1.5" in 7-10 days after hatching. The 'youngsters' (~1/2" long) cause little damage, but serve as great indicators of the need to act **if we look (scout) for them at least every other day.**

The biggest/oldest larval stage ('instar', ≥ 1.5 ") accounts for ~80% of this insect's damage. Since larvae grow so quickly, they can develop into a serious 'army' of grass-leaf mowers alarmingly fast.

There are a number of pesticide treatment options available (both conventional and organic), but they are generally cost-effective **ONLY** on larvae less than 1" long. I recommend vigilant scouting (at least every other day) of your grass-dominant hay and haylage, corn, and small-grain fields; so you have the option to avoid an insecticide application that could also take out both known and unknown 'beneficial' critters.

Armyworm larvae are night feeders, so are somewhat difficult to find 'napping' during the day. During the day, they'll be curled up on the ground, 'resting' from a bountiful nighttime feast, hidden under debris and/or in corn whorls.

When to Harvest

In a nutshell, mature grass-dominant hayfields with evidence of armyworm leaf-feeding should be harvested as soon as possible, and re-growth monitored closely. With little grass leaf-tissue present after harvesting, surviving larvae are likely to 'march' elsewhere in search of a more abundant local grass-leaf platter. Thus, scout young corn often, especially in fields next to grassy borders, no-tilled fields where grassy residue remains, and fields adjacent to armyworm-damaged grass-dominant fields that were recently harvested.

Scout Small Grain Fields Too

To-date, I'm unaware of armyworm-damage to small-grain fields in NNY, but please scout those vigilantly as well.

Consider Grazing

True-armyworm infestations are showing up in both mature 1st-crop and re-growth grass-forage, so it's an opportune time to be equipped (fenced) to graze 2nd-crop forage that may be too short to profitably harvest by machine; something to think about for future risk-reduction.

For More Info:

For a wealth of armyworm resources; photos, and scouting and management recommendations, visit the Cornell Cooperative Extension Northern New York website at www.ccenny.com

Northern New York is fortunate to have a number of excellent contacts you've turned to in the past regarding the current armyworm situation. But for general armyworm-management information and suggestions in field crops in NNY, feel free to contact me:

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For specific insecticide options:
contact your local supplier or custom applicator