

Insects

Sorghum Webworm in Grain Sorghum

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Introduction

The sorghum webworm (Figure 1) is an occasional pest of sorghum in Tennessee. Grain sorghum that is planted in late June can become severely damaged by this insect. Heavy infestations of webworms may completely destroy a developing grain head.

Description and Biology

The adult female moth is white and is active at night. Eggs are laid on the flowering parts of the plant and will hatch in three to four days. Upon hatching, the larvae are very small, hairy and have dark tan stripes down their backs. When the larvae are fully grown, they can measure up to 1/2-inch long. The sorghum webworm will feed for 12 to 13 days in the larval stage, after which they will pupate within a white cocoon on the grain head. A generation takes 30 days to complete. There may be two or three generations each year in Tennessee.

Symptoms and Damage

Very young larvae feed on the floral parts of the grain head, while older larvae will gnaw holes in the grain kernels, leaving a hollowed-out shell. The larvae do not spin webs over

the grain head, but can suspend themselves by spinning a fine silken strand. Fine webbing can be seen with heavy webworm populations.

Scouting Techniques

To scout for presence of the sorghum webworm, first examine the leaves below the grain head. If there are webworms present, there will be white frass or fecal droppings on the tops of any leaves below the grain head.

Numerous droppings indicate large numbers of webworms are present. Examine a minimum of 100 grain heads across the field for worms. Vigorously shake each grain head over a white piece of cardboard and count the number of worms per grain head. If an average of five or more larvae per head are present, treatment with an insecticide may be needed.

Control

Many insecticides will control small worms. However, preventive measures, such as planting in early May to avoid infestations, also work well in Tennessee.



Recommended Insecticides

Material	Rate/Acre	Pre-harvest Interval
Lannate SP	1/2 lb.	14 days (grain)
Lannate LV	1 1/2 pts.	14 days (grain)
Lorsban 4E	1 pt.	30 days (grain)
Sevin XLR	Plus 1 to 2 qts.	21 days (grain)
Tracer	1.5 to 3.0 oz.	7 days (grain)
Warrior T	2.56 to 3.8 oz.	30 days (see label)
Baythroid 2	1.3 to 2.8 oz.	14 days
Mustang Max	1.76 to 4.0 oz.	14 days



*Figure 1. Sorghum webworm on developing grain head.
Photo by R. Glodt*

Precautionary Statement

This publication contains pesticide recommendations that are subject to change at any time. The recommendations in this publication are provided only as a guide. It is always the pesticide applicator's responsibility, by law, to read and follow all current label directions for the specific pesticide being used. The label always takes precedence over the recommendations found in this publication.

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