

Farmers advised to watch for stink bugs in fields

By MARTHA BLUM

AgriNews Publications

SCARBOROUGH, Ill. — Many corn growers have adopted an insurance pest management program.

"The standard approach for insect management in corn is to rely for the most part on Bt to provide a broad spectrum of insect control," said Mike Gray, University of Illinois Extension entomologist. "When you plant Bt hybrids, you really don't know if an insect population will be an economic threat or not."

In 2010, 52 percent of all corn planted in Illinois was a stacked variety, Gray reported during the Northern Illinois Research Center Field Day.

At the 2011 U of I Corn and Soybean Classics presented at several locations, Gray asked farmers if they were planting Bt hybrids this year.

"Almost 100 percent of the growers intended to plant a Bt hybrid," he said.

Gray sees a significant movement under way. "The industry is going to pyramid Bt hybrids," he noted. "A pyramided hybrid has two or more proteins effective against the same pest which is more difficult for insects to develop resistance. A stacked Bt hybrid and has toxins effective against different pests."

The U of I entomologist talked about the research project at the center to evaluate rootworm protection.

"Some of those plants in our checks have pretty significant root pruning and that's what we want to see to challenge the Bt products and insecticides," he said. "I think we're going to have a good experiment."

The research compares several treatments including seed-applied insecticides, granular soil insecticides, seed-applied insecticides combined with soil insecticides, Bt hybrids and Bt hybrids with insecticide seed treatments.

Roots are rated using a nodal injury scale of 1, 2 or 3. A rating of 1 represents one node of roots destroyed up to a rating of 3 which means three nodes of roots destroyed.

"Five years of research here has shown for every one node of roots destroyed by corn rootworm, we lose about 22 bushels of yield," the entomologist reported.

"When I combine the data from four U of I research locations, it suggests for every one node of roots pruned away, we lose 27 bushels. Looking at today's corn price, that's pretty significant."

Gray also discussed insects to be watching for in fields.

"A lot of you have seen green and brown stink bugs in the past," he said. "But there was a stink bug found at the South Farms in Urbana that I had not seen before."

"This stink bug is either a redshouldered stink bug or a redbanded stink bug."

"Stink bugs insert their mouth parts through soybean pods and remove fluids from the developing beans, and they also open pods to make them more susceptible to disease," Gray explained.

"Of the two, the redbanded stink bug is more difficult to control and the one I'm more worried about," he added.

"To tell them apart, the redbanded stink bug has a very prominent spine between the middle and hind set of legs and the redshouldered stink bug has no spine."

Gray is going to begin a stink bug survey. The statewide effort is funded by the Illinois Soybean Association.

"If you spot a redbanded or redshouldered stink bug, let me know," he said.

The entomologist is also very concerned about the brown marmorated stink bug.

"This stink bug was first found in Pennsylvania and it

got here from infested packing crates from China," Gray explained. "It has now spread throughout Pennsylvania, the Mid-Atlantic states and it has been confirmed in four Illinois counties."

The brown marmorated stink bug feeds on almost every kind of fruit and vegetable as well as corn and soybeans. "It uses its mouth parts to directly penetrate the husk of a developing ear and sucks the fluids out of the tender kernels," Gray said. "It has alternating light and dark bands along the wings and antennae."

In addition, just like the Asian lady beetles, the marmorated stink bug will also move into houses in the fall.

"I've seen photos of hundreds and hundreds of the stink bugs showing up in people's homes," Gray said. "I suspect over the years, you're going to hear me speak more about these stink bugs."

Growers Edge bringing together information to help farmers

By JEANNINE OTTO

AgriNews Publications

DES MOINES, Iowa — Providing farmers with all the information, from markets to weather to cash and futures prices for grain so they can manage risk and increase profitability for their individual farming operations, is the goal of a new service.

"Help us understand all this information is what we hear, and that's really where we're trying to go with Growers Edge," said Craig Mouchka, a native of Iowa and a graduate of Drake University.

Mouchka founded Growers Edge, an Internet site that provides a variety of market and weather information, as well as online calculating tools, in 2007.

"We want to help farmers manage volatility and provide transparency. We want to help them answer the question 'Are we doing the right things for this farming operation?'" said Greg Ehm of Two Rivers Marketing, which is helping spread the word about Growers Edge.

Growers Edge is based in West Des Moines and also has information technology groups throughout the Midwest who work around the clock to gather the market data and information that makes Growers Edge unique to its niche of farm market information.

"We're very IT heavy. We have a team of over 50 people making it happen," Mouchka said.

That includes LiveChat support.

"We want to provide plenty of support," said Mouchka, who said ease of use for farmers is a top priority.

"We preach to the team all the time 'simplify, simplify, simplify.' How can we make it easier to use?" he said.

"We summarize everything on the homepage. If we can save them time, we want to," said Mouchka, who focuses on the number of users — currently at more than 10,000 — versus the time spent at the site.

The other factor that makes Growers Edge special is that Mouchka and his team are utilizing the Internet to provide the same information that formerly was available through satellites.

"We're seeing a transition away from satellite. It's a one way pipe and the Internet is a two-way pipe," said Mouchka, who emphasizes that Growers Edge is designed to work in concert with the information being provided to farmers by the professionals with whom they are working, such as crop insurance agents and grain marketers.

"I was noticing where farmers were struggling with sorting out all the information they were being given by professionals, and now Growers Edge will give them one place to go to utilize that information. They can take that information home and utilize it," said Mouchka, who added that he has three goals for Growers Edge.

"Can we save them money, can we make them more money and can we save them time?" he said.

One of the best aspects of Growers Edge for farmers is that it is free.

"We're free, and there are no catches," Mouchka said.

The site is supported by advertising. Each farmer does have to register for an account and has a username and password, which are secure.

Mouchka said he is firm about the information that each user enters remaining safe, secure and private.

"We don't share that information or sell it off to third parties," he stressed.

"We want everything easy to use and uncluttered and very tailored to the individual," said Mouchka, who worked in ag sales, risk management and agricultural lending prior to starting Growers Edge.

While not from a farm, his grandfather and uncle farmed, and Mouchka worked on their farms on his summers home from school.

Some of the highlights of Growers Edge include the CashMax and Profit Manager features.

CashMax provides farmers with up-to-date prices from the Board of Trade and from the five closest buying locations, from elevators to ethanol plants, to each individual farm location entered by the user. The feature calculates the most profitable spot and forward market cash bids within

a 200-mile radius of the farm. "We pinpoint the home via the address they give when they register and they can pinpoint two additional locations," Mouchka explained.

CashMax also includes computation of transportation costs using actual road distance, not "as the crow flies" distance. Information for hauling rates and storage costs also is provided.

CashMax provides prices for corn, soybeans, wheat and sorghum and also provides historical basis intelligence from two to five years for each location, as well as the phone numbers for each location. Another feature is a color-coded basis map.

"It shows them what the competition is for grain on any given day," Mouchka said. "We aim to make them 10 to 30 cents more pure bushel on any given day."

"Unique to Growers Edge" is how Mouchka describes the Profit Manager feature which gives each individual the opportunity to set a profit goal and then track, using actual information for his or her own farm, the progress in reaching that goal.

"Each farmer can establish a profit per acre goal, as well as a breakeven goal," Mouchka said. "We can tell him, using his bushels sold and the value of his unsold bushels, how he's doing as far as reaching his profit-per-acre goal."

The Profit Analyzer feature is scheduled to be ready for use by the end of 2011.

"Profit Analyzer will allow the farmer to enter his risk management and marketing plans to track his farming operation throughout the year," said Mouchka, who said the Profit Analyzer also will allow growers to see their indemnity payments and profits in a worksheet-style format.

"One, the Profit Manager, is your action, and the other, the Profit Analyzer, is your plan," he said.

Profit Analyzer will allow farmers to input "what if" scenarios of harvest yield and price, as well as program payments and prices and input costs.

"They can take the information that their insurance agent or grain marketer gives them and see how it can work for them," said Mouchka, who added that the Profit Analyzer will help growers see how best to utilize crop insurance.

"It really is more important than ever to use that crop insurance to your benefit," he said.

Growers Edge also aims to provide its information to users wherever they are. Farmers can opt in or out of receiving information through text messaging when they register.

"Our goal is to provide them whatever they want from the website to their cell phone," said Mouchka, who said that the site's market commentary offerings and Seller's Edge features are among the most popular texts.

Population

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"Many rural areas can't attract workers because there aren't any jobs, and businesses won't relocate there because there aren't enough qualified workers. So they are caught in a downward spiral," said the associate vice president of the Population Reference Bureau, a research group in Washington, D.C.

Rural towns are scrambling to attract new residents and stave off heavy funding cuts from financially strapped federal and state governments.

Delta Air Lines recently announced it would end flight service to 24 small airports, several of them in the Great Plains, and the U.S. Postal Service is mulling plans to close thousands of branches in mostly rural areas of the country.

The University of Kansas recently opened a new medical school with a class of eight in Salina, a regional hub of nearly 50,000 people, in hopes of supporting nearby rural communities that have no doctors at all.

In North Dakota, colleges are seeking to draw in young adults by charging low tuition and fees. It's part of a broader trend in which many slow-growing rural states are touting recreational scenic landscapes or extending tuition breaks to out-of-state residents who typically are charged more.

Many rural areas, the central Great Plains in particular, have been steadily losing population since the 1930s with few signs of the trend slowing in coming decades, according to census figures.

The share of people in rural areas over the past decade fell to 16 percent, passing the previous low of 20 percent in 2000. The rural share is expected to drop further as the U.S. population balloons from 309 million to 400 million by mid-century, leading people to crowd cities and suburbs and fill in the open spaces around them.

In 1910, the population share of rural America was 72 percent. Such areas remained home to a majority of Americans until 1950, amid post-World War II economic expansion and the baby boom.

Among the struggling rural areas are vast stretches of West Virginia in Appalachia. Several of the state's counties over the past decade have lost large chunks of their population following the collapse of logging and coal-mining industries during the 1960s.

The numbers are based partly on an analysis by the Population Reference Bureau. The data were supplemented with calculations by Robert Lang, a sociology professor at the University of Nevada-Las Vegas, and William H. Frey, a demographer at the Brookings Institution. "Rural" is generally de-

fined as nonmetropolitan areas with fewer than 50,000 people.

While rural America shrinks, larger U.S. metro areas have enjoyed double-digit percentage gains in population over the past several decades.

Since 2000, metros grew overall by 11 percent with the biggest

gains in suburbs or small- or medium-sized cities.

In fact, of the 10 fastest-growing places, all were small cities incorporated into the suburbs of expanding metro areas, mostly in California, Arizona and Texas.

In all, the share of Americans living in sub-

urbs has climbed to an all-time high of 51 percent. Despite sharp declines in big cities in the Northeast and Midwest since 2000 due to the recession, U.S. cities increased their share by 3 percentage points to 33 percent.

"These new patterns suggest that there will be a blurring of boundaries

as regions expand well beyond official government-defined definitions," Frey said.

"People like to 'have it all' — affordable housing in a smaller-town setting but in close proximity to jobs and big-city amenities such as specialized shopping, cultural events and major sports and entertainment venues."

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