

# BETWEEN THE ROWS

May 8, 2017

BLACK CUTWORM AND TRUE ARMYWORM

wyffels.com

Black cutworm and true armyworm are sporadic pests in the Midwest. They don't overwinter in the Corn Belt, but the moths are carried north each spring by southerly winds. The moths themselves don't cause economic damage, but the eggs they deposit eventually hatch into larvae which can cause significant damage by feeding on young corn plants.

## Projected Cut Dates

Universities have established insect monitoring networks in their respective states to monitor moth flights and predict when damage may occur. Reports from various counties in Illinois indicate pheromone trap capture of both black cutworm moths and true armyworm moths are increasing and southerly winds will bring additional numbers north. Large moth captures don't necessarily mean damage is imminent, but should alert growers to begin scouting fields for potential damage.

The figure at right show the projected cut dates for black cutworm in Illinois based on peak moth flights. Large moth captures have not yet been reported in Iowa, but they still could pose a threat later this spring. Updated information can be found on the [Iowa State University Integrated Pest Management website](http://www.pestmanagement.org).

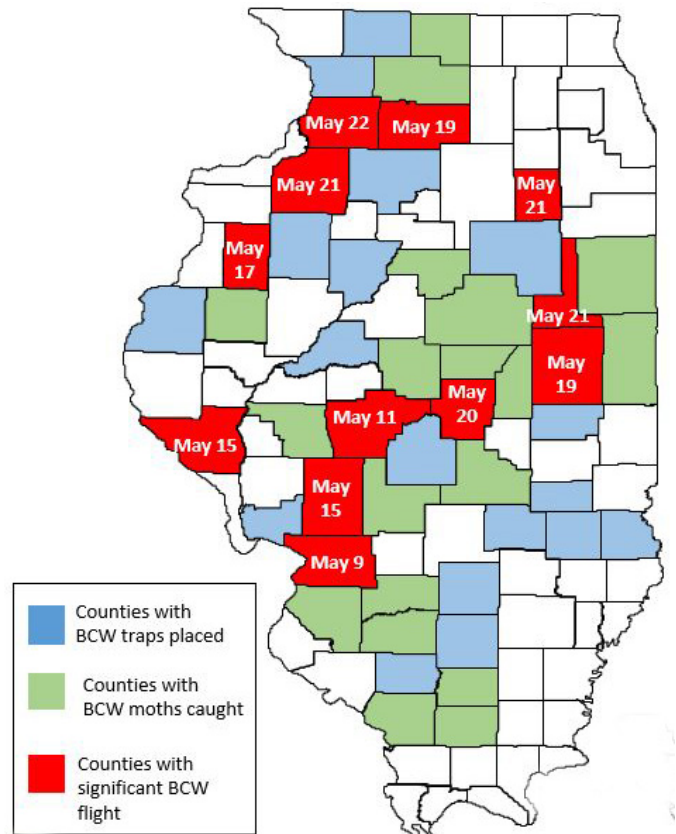
Corn in the V1 to V4 stage of development is most susceptible to cutting by black cutworm larvae. Planting dates will align larval development and cutting with early corn development in many areas. The combination of larger larvae and smaller corn provides a greater potential for stand reduction. Scouting is essential to determine if an infestation exists and treatment is required, even in fields planted with a traired hybrid.

## Black Cutworm

There are several species of cutworm that attack corn in the Midwest, but the black cutworm poses the most serious threat. Depending on the size of corn plants when they attack, one black cutworm larvae can cut up to five corn plants in its lifetime. Black cutworm moths move up from the south with springtime winds and storms. The time and area in which cutworms will be most prevalent varies from year to year, but they most commonly move into the Midwest March through June.

The moths are most attracted to, and will lay their eggs, in early spring vegetation. This makes fields with cover crops and no-till fields with heavy weed growth the most susceptible. These fields are the highest risk and should be the first focus of scouting.

Newly hatched larvae feed on weeds and/or young corn plants leaving small irregular holes in leaves. This early feeding does little to affect yield of young plants, but it's an indicator of the potential for severe damage in the future. Larger larvae may notch the stems of corn plants below the soil surface causing them to wilt and die, or they can completely cut through stalks causing major stand reductions.



*Kelly Estes, State Survey Coordinator, Illinois Cooperative Agricultural Pest Survey Program*

Black cutworms will often do most of their damage at night, and then bury themselves in the soil during the day. So if evidence of damage is found, further inspection around those plants should be done to determine if larvae are present.

Hybrids with the SmartStax® trait are labeled for black cutworm protection. Control can also be achieved with pre-plant or planting-time applications of soil applied insecticides. A large population can still overwhelm traits, and insecticide effectiveness does vary based on weather conditions, so it's still important to scout these fields for potential damage.



Black Cutworm Larvae



Black Cutworm Moth



True Armyworm Larvae



True Armyworm Moth

Photos: Iowa State University, used by permission.

A rescue treatment may be necessary if 3-5% of the plants show damage and 2 or more live larvae (less than  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch in length) are found per 100 plants. Not all damaged plants will be killed. Some small plants that are cut off could re-grow if the growing point is still viable. Fields with small corn plants and large larvae are the most likely to have economic damage.

The success of rescue treatments is weather dependent. Dry soil conditions can cause a decrease in performance of broadcast applications because the larvae could avoid contact with applied insecticide by staying below the soil surface. Under dry soil conditions, some tillage like rotary hoeing can stimulate larvae movement in the soil and bring them into contact with the insecticide. Products containing Pyrethroids should not be incorporated, so refer to the label and consult with your pesticide supplier.

### True Armyworm

True armyworms also migrate from the south in the spring. They prefer to lay eggs in grassy areas such as grass pastures, roadsides, and along fence rows. The feeding larvae may move out of these areas in search of available food sources like corn or small grain. Feeding in corn fields (usually along leaf margins) is evident during late May or early June.

The economic threshold for rescue treatment in seedling corn is triggered when 25% of the plants are being damaged and larvae are still present. It's important to remember that seed applied insecticides and Bt traits don't provide protection against true armyworm, so if damage is evident and larvae are still present a rescue treatment should be applied to protect yield potential.

Don't confuse true armyworm with fall armyworm, they are two different insects. True armyworm is a pest of late spring and summer, while fall armyworm is typically present late summer or fall. Nearly all Bt corn hybrids either control or suppress fall armyworm, but not true armyworm.

### Scout to Protect Yield Potential

Black cutworm and true armyworm presence is sporadic and often field specific. The best way to know what is going on in your fields is to scout for damage. Fields with plant growth during the spring, either from winter annuals or cover crops, are more likely to attract egg-laying moths. If damage is detected early, a rescue treatment can be used to limit the extent of the damage and protect yield potential.

For updated trap captures and projected infestation dates refer to these links:

Illinois: [@ILPestSurvey on Twitter](#)

Iowa: <http://crops.extension.iastate.edu/cropnews>

From the desk of



**Mitch Heisler**  
Marketing Manager

309.945.7032 cell  
[mheisler@wyffels.com](mailto:mheisler@wyffels.com)