

Spring is a Good Time to Bait Wireworms

As damage to field crops is poised to escalate, consider playing a proactive role in finding a wireworm control solution for your area by submitting samples to Canada's wireworm research team. Lindane (e.g. Vitavax Dual, etc) insecticide kept wireworm numbers low for several decades on the Prairies. Since the ban of this organochlorine pesticide in 2004, wireworm damage in field crops is rebounding; some researchers suggesting we may just be catching a glimpse of the tip of the iceberg at this point. Varying from region to region, some 30 different wireworm species exhibit diverse behaviours and lifecycles, making a single control measure improbable. An individual region may contain more than one wireworm species. The worm-like larvae can feed on plant roots and germinating seeds for up to 3 to 5 years, depending on the species, before developing into the adult click beetle stage. While current seed treatments may repel wireworms for a growing season, their populations can continue to increase so that these treatment measures begin to fail.

Canada's wireworm research team, headed by Dr. Vernon and Dr. van Herk of Agriculture and Agri-food Canada, is identifying wireworm species and researching control measures. The research team needs to know which specific wireworm species dominates in your farming region so the correct control option(s) can be applied as the problem worsens. Although most crops are susceptible, wireworms prefer eating annual and perennial grasses, so populations can build up in fields that have extended periods of cereal crops or pasture. Crops grown in recently broken sod are especially vulnerable. Due to a greater amount of soil moisture, wireworms migrate near to the soil surface in early spring, making spring the best time to bait and capture wireworms. Baiting can be as simple as burying a small amount (a cup or so) of a cereal-based product like flour, bran or wheat seeds to a depth of four to six inches into the soil at marked locations randomly across a field. Dig up the baits 10 to 14 days later, collecting wireworms and some field soil (not too wet), and then insert them into a hard plastic container for shipping. There may be more than one species present, so collect as many wireworms as possible. Mail your wireworm sample(s) to:

Dr. Vernon
Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada
6947 #7 Hwy
P.O. Box 1000
Agassiz, B.C. V0M 1A0

Please include a brief description of where the sample was collected (nearest town or address), information about your crop rotation in this field over the past 4 years, your name and phone number. Once the species are identified, you will be contacted with the results.

-Neil Whatley, March 2014