

# Are cover crops shifting insect populations?

*Early results indicate cover crops aren't providing cover for insects*

BY DUANE FRIEND

The adoption of cover crops has increased at a slow but steady pace over the last few years. One of the questions producers may have is what type of insects may be present in cover crops, and are they beneficial or pest in nature?

A University of Illinois study in central and southern Illinois is examining this.

Led by Dr. Nick Seiter at the University of Illinois and with help from University of Illinois Extension field staff, the study is assessing insects in soybean fields following cereal rye.

Results are compared to nearby fields with

no cover crop.

The study is also examining the effect of cover termination timing on insects and damage potential.

The concern here is having a green living cover with similar pest insects present at the time the regular crop is planted, providing a "green bridge" for the insects to continue their life cycle.

Forty-four soybean fields were looked at in 2019. Twenty-three sites had a rye cover, with 21 having no cover.

Several sampling techniques were used, including sticky, pitfall, pheromone, and shingle traps.

Sampling was done weekly. Due to the wet spring, some sites were sampled up to six weeks before planting, with all sites continuing sampling for three weeks after planting.

Due to the huge number of samples, processing and analyzing samples is ongoing. Basic results for the 2019 growing season showed no obvious difference in insect or slug damage between the rye cover and no cover plots.

In the termination trials, no serious insect damage was evident based on late termination. Some fields in southern Illinois did have slug damage, but the damage in both

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cover and non-cover fields were similar.

While this is the first year of the study, the takeaway so far appears to be that rye cover crops work well when going into soybean.

It is too early to tell if beneficial insects from cover crops help the regular crop, and will continue to be researched.

Though cover crops don't guarantee pest problems, they may increase certain infestations, especially if the cover crop is similar to the regular crop being grown, such as a grass type cover crop before corn.

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cover crops 10 to 21 days before planting. This will help remove the "green bridge", and is more critical when the field is going into corn.

As always, be vigilant and scout at planting time whether using a cover crop or not. If using a grassy cover like rye before corn, be on the lookout for cutworms or armyworms. Cutworm treatments are warranted if greater than 5% of plants are cut. Armyworm treatments should be used if 25% of the corn plants are damaged.



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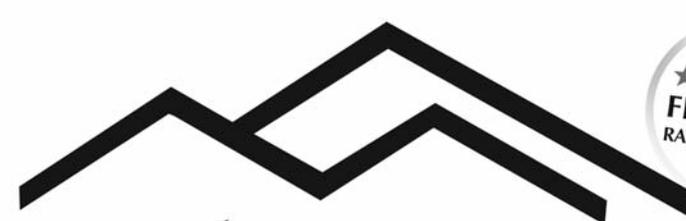


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