

Farm and garden

Worms, worms, worms

Forest Tent Caterpillars are camping here again

By: Stanley J. Winslow
County Extension Director

Just when you thought you were safe from our perennial pests — The Forest Tent caterpillars — they attack again. Samples submitted to our office indicate that they are already beginning to hatch. The caterpillars I have seen are currently one-eighth inch long



with the diameter of a straight pin. They will grow rapidly, doubling in size in approximately one week's time. All eggs will not hatch at the same time; therefore, expect to see these creatures for the next four to six weeks.

Let me give you a brief life history of this insect so you will understand it better. The Forest Tent Caterpillar is a serious defoliator of many forest and shade trees. As you well know it migrates by the millions searching for new food plants and will climb any obstacle in its path. It prefers sweet gum and tupelo gum but will also feed on poplar, maple, oak, ash, elm, fruit trees and many ornamental trees and shrubs. It is a close relative to the Eastern Tent Caterpillar which you see spinning webs in the forks of fruit tree branches. The main difference is that the Forest Tent Caterpillar does not spin these webs.

This insect spends the winter as a dark brown collar-like mass of eggs securely attached to, and often encircling, small twigs. Egg

masses are about ¼ inch long by ½ inch in diameter and contain several hundred eggs. Hatch out corresponds with emergence of new leaves. These newly hatched caterpillars will feed on their "parent" plant until that food source is exhausted; then their great migration begins.

If you begin now, you can control them while in their early stages of growth. Chemicals such as Dipel, Thuricide, Sevin, Malathion and Orthene do a good job on them while they are small. When they reach full size, 1½ inches long, and begin to migrate they are much more difficult to control.

Plan your management strategy for these pests now. Scout your

fruit, shade and ornamental trees for egg masses and small worms. If you find small worms - spray

them and then watch carefully to see that no more hatch out. Keep in mind that these pests will migrate to you from joining wood land and neighboring property. When migration begins consider using a product called tangle foot or a strip of duct tape wrapped around the tree trunk and covered with vaseline to prevent caterpillars from climbing.

These pests are a true nuisance but indications are that they will not be quite as bad as last year. This remains to be seen - please call if you have questions.



A kite exhibit has been on display at Hertford Grammar School during the past month. The posters are on loan to Brenda Hollowell, art instructor, from The Museum of the Albemarle. The museum acquired the exhibit from the Smithsonian.

Mother Nature is farm boss

Farmers rely on many factors to produce their final product. There's the price of inputs, like seed, fertilizer, fuel and labor. And there's the price of the end product, which ultimately determines their profit.

There are also other factors affecting agriculture. For example,



government regulatory agencies can tell farmers just about anything—from what type of pesticides they can use to what to feed livestock. Lending institutions can extend credit or not; and the interest rates charged can impact heavily on agriculture. Big labor can refuse to load agricultural products for shipment and it can tell some farm workers not to pick a crop and let it rot in the field.

Actually, agriculture is greatly affected by all of these things, but they don't really control agriculture. The real controlling force is the weather.

Nearly every year in some parts of the country, the weather takes its toll. What better example than the drought in parts of North Carolina for the past several years?

In fact, last year much of the country suffered from unseasonably hot and dry conditions. Add

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Rodents are bother to county hog farms

by: Jeff Copeland
Area Specialized Agent, Livestock

Mice and rats are a nuisance at some time on most every hog farm. Adequate shelter, hiding places, food and water are readily available to make these pests feel right at home. Left unchecked, they are quite impressive with their reproduction capabilities. For example, a female house mouse may have 5-



10 litters per year of five to six young each which equals to 60 more mice annually. Mice have a 19-21 day gestation and reach sexual maturity in 6-10 weeks so the mouse in our example becomes a great grandmother rather quickly. And all the time, she and all subsequent offspring are soiling feed with their feces, gnawing insulation and wires, spreading diseases and the like.

Mice are often harder to control than rats because of the difference in their eating habits. Mice like to eat and run; eat and run. This makes baiting difficult at best. One good idea that should work on your farm is to place two foot sections of flexible, black plastic tile on top of your insulation in the roof, or nail the plastic tile on top of the support beams or along aisle ways, in feed rooms etc. Space one every 20 to 30 feet. The grooves in the tile help prevent spillage of the rat and mice bait. This concept works on the principles that mice and rats like to hide while feeding, and a mouse loves to run through a tunnel.

When purchasing rat and mice poison, remember, some bait is considered single dose and others require more than one feeding. Also bear in mind that some rats have become resistant to warfarin. If your old standby doesn't seem to work any longer, buy another bait with a chemical other than warfarin in it.

Thimet and Counter are not only very dangerous to use, but are also expensive rat baits. Baits like Contrac or Havoc are far more sensible and cheaper choices providing good control.

A good strategy to use on rats is outlined. For single dose baits - first determine the number of active burrows; place bait in active burrows; bait one-two days; close all burrows for five-seven days; and then bait all active burrows for one-two days. Finally close all burrows and monitor for activity. For multi-dose baits; bait active burrows for 10-14 days or until it's no longer taken and then close and monitor for activity.

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to that the fires on federal lands that wiped out crops and livestock on adjacent land and it's easy to understand that Mother Nature is in charge.

Very few businesses depend on such an uncertain factor to survive. But the farmer has an eternal battle with the weather. However, he accepts the weather's unpredictability as part of the gamble involved in his chosen profession. It's just Mother Nature's way of letting us know that she's the boss.

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