

Providing Leadership in Environmental Entomology

Department of Entomology, Soils, and Plant Sciences • 114 Long Hall • Clemson, SC 29634-0315 • Phone: 864-656-3111
email:dpento@clemson.edu

Wireworms on Corn

Several species of wireworms are found in corn fields in South Carolina. In the past, tobacco wireworms and sand wireworms have been the only two species of consequence. However, the sand wireworm has been replaced by the southern potato wireworm in importance. The adults, known as “click beetles,” are fairly distinguishable from one another. However, the larvae are quite hard to tell apart. Since life history and control practices are essentially the same, they will not be distinguished here.

Wireworm eggs are usually laid in the summer. When the eggs hatch, the larvae feed on a variety of different roots, overwintering in one of several larval instars, or stages. As corn is planted in the spring, wireworm larvae that are present feed on the corn kernels, causing poor germination and stunted, sickly-looking plants.

Damage due to wireworms varies from year to year. There may be serious damage some years, and practically no damage in other years. Some damage, however, occurs nearly every year.

Proper crop rotation may be of only limited value against wireworms. Some fields are problem fields year after year. Rotation away from such fields would be advantageous. On the other hand, rotation into such a field may result in considerable wireworm problems even if corn had never been planted there before.

A banded application of a labeled insecticide at planting or pre-planting gives the best control of wireworms. Since the list of labeled products is constantly changing, and since available products varies from state to state, there will be no mention

of specific products. With all insecticides, read and follow label instructions carefully.



Wireworm attacking a corn seedling.
Photo: Clemson University CE Series 1736A.

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Prepared by Donald G. Manley, Extension Entomologist/Professor, Department of Entomology, Soils, and Plant Sciences, Clemson University.

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EiIS/AG-1 (New 03/1999).