

Identify and act early to control slugs

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Growers in districts where slugs are known to be an issue need to be pro-active, not wait until they see slug damage in crops, according to Southern Farming Systems CEO Jon Midwood.

They also need to know which slugs are present and use a combination of cultural and chemical methods to control them.

These are key findings from trials in the high-rainfall zone of southern Victoria following severe slug damage in 2011.

The identification issue is important because different slug species become active under different conditions, a point illustrated by the experiences of growers who successfully reduced slug populations early in the season, only to have their crops severely damaged by later emergence of another species.

Slug activity is determined largely by moisture and temperature, Mr Midwood said. The grey field slug, for example, lives mainly at the soil surface and is favoured



ACCURATE IDENTIFICATION IS VITAL FOR EFFECTIVE SLUG CONTROL. THE GREY FIELD SLUG (TOP) LIVES AT THE SOIL SURFACE AND IS LIKELY TO BE ACTIVE EARLY IN THE SEASON. THE BLACK KEEL SLUG (BOTTOM) BURROWS INTO THE SOIL AND BECOMES ACTIVE LATER, WHEN MOISTURE PENETRATES DEEPER INTO THE SOIL.



JON MIDWOOD SAYS ACCURATE IDENTIFICATION IS KEY TO EFFECTIVE SLUG CONTROL, WITH DIFFERENT SPECIES FAVOURED BY DIFFERENT CONDITIONS AND ACTIVE AT DIFFERENT TIMES IN THE SEASON.

by moist surface conditions. The black keel slug, which can burrow to a depth of 20 cm, requires sub-soil moisture.

In a paddock in which both these species are present there is a risk of early damage from the grey slug, with a second, later threat from the black keeled slug which becomes active only once rainfall wets the soil to greater depth.

This means that applying bait between seeding and emergence is likely to control only the grey slug, if the soils are dry at depth, with the black keeled slug emerging later after the bait has been used or has lost its efficacy.

Crop residues, other organic matter and summer weeds are all feed sources for slugs, so summer weed control and

burning to reduce surface cover can help minimise slug populations by reducing the amount of food and shelter available, Mr Midwood said.

Baiting can be effective but it is important to ensure baits are evenly spread.

Light cultivation can also reduce slug numbers and destroy the habitat of the grey field slug.

Canola is at more risk of significant slug damage than cereals because it has its growing point above the soil surface, so if a young plant is eaten off by a slug or

snail there is no potential for it to recover.

A population of one/m² is considered the damage threshold for slugs in canola, with eight slugs/m² a severe infestation.

One of the cultural 'tools' to minimise the risk of slug damage is to sow canola early into warmer soil so there is a greater chance of the crop 'growing away' from slug damage, which is most serious when the pests attack very young plants at or immediately following emergence.

Rolling with a 'ring' or 'Cambridge' roller or similar that has ridges around the roller cylinder in the direction of travel can reduce the shelter for slugs at the soil surface by improving soil consolidation and increase the speed of emergence by improving seed-soil contact.

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Rubber tyre rollers are less effective, although rolling immediately after sowing restricts slug movement in the seed bed. Seeder press wheels do not have the same effect.

Baiting can be effective but it is important to ensure baits are evenly spread, which means checking the width of spread and evenness of distribution from the spreader with the bait being used, he said.

"Spreader set up to achieve good spread of slug or snail bait will be quite different from that required for urea or other fertiliser.

"Recent research in SA has shown that ute-mounted spreaders that spread urea over 15 metres distributed slug and snail baits over only half that width, while other spreaders thought to be spreading bait to 35 metres were in fact distributing bait over only 20 metres.

"Trial results show that even distribution of 25 baits a square metre gives an 80% chance of a slug encountering a bait in the first night after spreading." 

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