

Invasive Insect (Bean Plataspid) Poses Risk to Soybean Crops and Infests Homes in Southeastern States

The bean plataspid (*Megacopta cribraria*) is an invasive insect from Asia that attacks soybean and other legumes. It also feeds on kudzu, an invasive plant species that has spread throughout the southern United States. The pest, which is sometimes called the kudzu bug or lablab bug, was first detected in the United States in November 2009 on kudzu in Barrow County, GA. At that time, a number of homeowners complained about a large number of bugs that had swarmed onto the sides of their homes and other structures, leaving a mildly offensive or bitter odor in their wake. As of August 2010, the bean plataspid has been identified throughout Georgia, in numerous South Carolina counties, and in one North Carolina county.

Background

The bean plataspid is native to India and China and is also found in Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam. The insect is pea-sized, greenish brown, and round with a wide posterior. It appears to waddle when it walks on a surface and is an excellent flier. Pictures of the pest are available online at www.aphis.usda.gov/bean-plataspid.

Its life cycle typically lasts 7 weeks. However, the chemistry of the host plant can significantly affect the insect's reproductive characteristics—such as fertility and length of generation—as well as its feeding rate and resulting impact on the host plant.

Adults and immature insects (nymphs) gather in large groups and suck sap from a host plant, weakening and stunting it. Adults have been observed sucking sap from the host plant's leaves, stems, budding flowers, and mature green pods. Severe infestations of adults and nymphs feeding on leaf sap can cause extensive defoliation in host plants. As host plants die off in cooler fall weather, the bean plataspid search for places to spend the winter, settling into attics and cracks in wood siding on houses.

Threat to Agricultural Resources

Reports from China indicate that the bean plataspid can significantly impact soybean production. In China, the pest has caused springtime crop losses of up to 50 percent and summertime losses of up to 30 percent. Severe infestations on some host plants result in seed yield losses, improperly developed pods, and under-sized seeds.

The bean plataspid is also listed as a harmful pest of Chinese fruit trees. If it moves to other host plants in the United States, the pest has the potential to cause significant agricultural damage.

Response Efforts

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is working actively with the State departments of agriculture of Georgia and North Carolina and the Department of Plant Industry in South Carolina to conduct surveys for the bean plataspid to determine the extent of the infestation. APHIS has also alerted extension agents in the surrounding States about the presence of the insect and the possibility of its spread into their States.

APHIS and the University of Georgia are currently developing methods of insecticide use against this newly introduced species. In addition, APHIS and university scientists are analyzing the bean plataspid's genetic background to determine its specific origin in Asia to help identify the pest's natural enemies.

How You Can Help

Please assist survey specialists who may need access to your property as they look for this pest. APHIS and its State partners must determine the boundaries of the infestation before they can determine the most effective approach to controlling the pest.

If you suspect the presence of the bean plataspid in your area, please notify your local county extension office or APHIS State office. You can find contact information for county extension offices at www.nifa.usda.gov/Extension. For APHIS State office contact information, visit www.aphis.usda.gov and click the "Report a pest or disease" link on the right-hand side of the screen. You can find pictures online at www.aphis.usda.gov/bean-plataspid that can help you to identify the insect.

Invasive species such as the bean plataspid can arrive in the United States in a number of ways, but the most common method is hitchhiking with international travelers who bring fruits, vegetables, plants, seeds, soil, or other agricultural items into the United States from foreign countries. Please declare all food, plants,

live animals, and plant or animal products to a U.S. Department of Homeland Security Custom and Border Protection officer or agriculture specialist at the first port of entry when you return from abroad. In addition, research the admissibility of plant and animal products before your trip. You can call APHIS at (301) 734-0841 for questions regarding plants and (301) 734-3277 for those regarding animals.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD). To file a complaint of discrimination, write to USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, or call (800) 795-3272 (voice) or (202) 720-6382 (TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.