Agronomy Factsheet:

SLUG PRESSURE IN FIELDS

THREAT

Slug feeding can cause damage during crop establishment and early growth, resulting in poor plant establishment, replanting in some situations, and potential yield loss.

IDENTIFICATION:

Slug feeding appears as feeding on the lower portion of the plant, causing ragged holes and, in some cases, killing the growing point of the plant. If the plants are still small or the population is very heavy and conditions are ideal, slugs can be found further up the plant. The most damage is typically seen in the May and June timeframe, and again in September to mid-October, particularly in cool wet conditions. When weather is hot and dry, as experienced in the summer, slugs move lower into the soil profile, emerging in the fall to feed on fall-planted crops and lay eggs. Slugs can lay up to 500 eggs per year.

FAVOURABLE CONDITIONS:

- Planting during cool, wet weather in the spring creates ideal conditions for slug damage to crops.
- A wet, cool fall or a winter season that has mild temperatures or that has high snowfall amounts (insulated ground) is also conducive to high slug populations in the spring.
- Higher risk fields include fields with high crop residue amounts, such as no-till corn, soybeans, and canola, wheat fields underseeded with red clover, and fields following forages.
- Slugs can also feed on weeds, organic matter, and fungi.
- Damage to fall-seeded crops can also occur.

CONTROL

Slugs require integrating several practices to achieve adequate control.

- Scout regularly.
- Rotate crops.
- Plant into optimal conditions (warm/dry) that help the crop grow quickly to avoid slug damage.
- Use row cleaners to move trash away from the seedbed to reduce feeding.
- Use starter fertilizer to help give plants a boost to get up and out of the ground quickly.
- Fall tillage to reduce crop residue will help remove the slug habitat.
    - If slugs are still present in the spring, further tillage might be required.
    - However, research in Pennsylvania has shown that vertical tillage, while it reduces slug population, has no impact on yield.
- Cover crops can increase natural enemy populations and limit unnecessary insecticide use, as beneficial beetles can be impacted.

WHAT TO DO TODAY:

While it might seem that the solution is to return to tillage from a no-till situation, no-till still provides a host of other benefits. Consider planting crops later in the season (in warmer/drier conditions) to ensure quick crop establishment.

Scout for slugs throughout the season, including spring, summer, and fall. Slugs that are present in the fall will overwinter and reappear in the spring, posing challenges. A simple way to monitor slug pressure is to lay 10 to 15 boards of wood on the soil surface (these act as shelters for the slugs) in the fall. Come back every five days, in the morning, for a month and count the number of slugs present. If slugs are commonly found under the boards, the field will be high risk for slug injury in the spring.

More information.

What's causing all the slugs- webinar

Crop IPM- Slugs