DAVID OWENS – SOYBEAN RESEARCH PROFILE

Farmer Blog



David Owens, Extension Entomology Specialist, University of Delaware Carvel Research and Education Center

Why did you decide to pursue a career that includes soybean research?
I was always fascinated by insects, but I didn't know what to do with that interest until I started working at an experiment station at Virginia Tech. I love working with farmers, troubleshooting for them and working in their fields. My position, which is 100% extension, is a good fit for me. Soybeans are a big part of that because they are an important crop. I also love working with soybeans because they support so many different insect species — not just pests. Some reports say up to 500 insect species live in soybeans, and just six to 12 of them are pests. But those pests can show up throughout the growing season.

What research topic have you completed in the past or are working on now that could have or has had the most significant impact on soybean production?
Many of my studies focus on pesticide management, including spray trials for various pests and products. Those trials feed directly into management recommendations. I have found that it is most important to get out into fields across the state, surveying them throughout the growing season to know what pests appear. That allows me to see the most common issues for growers.

How has the soybean checkoff enhanced your ability to find answers to production problems for farmers?
I am grateful to the soy checkoff for the support. Funding and feedback from Delaware Soybean Board members helps focus my activities. The work I do requires seasonal technical support and students in the lab. The soy checkoff helps fund those positions so we can generate data that gets fed back into grower recommendations.

Within your area of expertise, what are the top two or three general recommendations

you would offer farmers to improve their management practices?

- *Actively scout fields, whether you do that yourself or have someone else do it. Farmers need knowledge of what is going on in their fields.*
- *Don't apply insecticide when it isn't needed. Though it is common to tank mix insecticides with other inputs, we typically don't see any benefits from including it unless pest populations have reached thresholds.*
- *Seek out and consider recommendations from local experts. For example, I include updates on soybean insect populations in our Delaware Weekly Crop Update. This helps farmers anticipate potential issues.*
- *For fields with a history of slug pressure, don't plant soybeans until after Memorial Day. They don't like hot weather. Vigorous germination and early growth are key to managing early season pests. For example, once soybeans have their first true leaves out, it is much harder for slugs to completely destroy them.*

Within your area of expertise, what do you consider to be critical soybean research needs that can impact the profitability of famers in the future?
We need localized research on cultural practices to make fields more resilient to slug pressure. There is nothing in the chemical pipeline to manage slugs, which have become one of the top pests in soybeans in our region. We need to understand how different management practices and weather impact slugs so that we can better manage them.

SRIN articles:

Exploring the Role of Cover Crops in Long-Term Slug Management

SOYBEAN RESEARCH & INFORMATION NETWORK

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