

# Identifying late-season caterpillars feeding in the ear

**Chris DiFonzo, Field Crops Entomologist**  
Michigan State University, East Lansing

Pictures credits: Chris DiFonzo except  
for CEW on corn: C. Bauer & M. Roth

CDD #53 2019

Late-season caterpillar feeding in corn is increasing in Michigan. Scouting is important to identify infested fields which may be at higher risk of ear mold infection and mycotoxins; these fields should be harvested early and the grain perhaps segregated. Scouting is also important to confirm which species is feeding, especially to determine if Bt traits or insecticide sprays performed as expected. Below are helpful tips and pictures to identify three caterpillars that feed in ears in August. Each has a 'drawing' to scale.

## **European corn borer**



- head capsule dark
- body surface smooth, uniform gray or tan
- powdery white or tan frass
- location: silks, ear, ear shank, or boring directly into the stalk



## **western bean cutworm**



- head capsule reddish-brown, plus 2 dark bars behind the head
- body surface smooth, russet or pinkish-brown, w/ faint patterning
- frass: dry chunks, mushy brown when wet
- location: ear tip or side, especially feeding between the ear and stalk



## **corn earworm**



- head capsule orange
- body surface rough with small black spines and dark spots; variable body colors (brown, yellow, pink, green) and prominent colorful striping
- frass: chunks, mushy tan when wet
- location: initially in silks, then ear tip or side

