Western Bean Cutworm in Whorl Stage (V10-V14) Corn

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Picture credits:
Chris DiFonzo
Taken in Oceana Co, July 2009

In 2009, one of the coolest summers on record in Michigan, crop development is delayed compared to other years. Western bean cutworm emergence was not delayed as much as crop growth. As a result, WBC moths are emerging into a landscape where much of the corn is not yet in the preferred stage (pre-tassel or just tasseling) for egg laying. Instead, females are laying eggs on short, mid-whorl corn.

What happens to these larvae? Will they survive? The answer is likely yes, based on dissections of whorl stage corn with newly hatched egg masses.

1] Newly hatched larvae (yellow arrow) chew directly into the whorl, leaving tiny pin holes (black arrows) much smaller than shot holes from European corn borer.

2] Larvae chew into center of whorl and…

3] Begin to feed on the developing tassel.

The larvae deep in the whorl are likely well protected from natural enemies.

The developing tassel provides a good source of nutrition. Thus, survival is likely good.

We do not know if larvae that feed on whorl stage corn spend a shorter time in the ear in August.