

ENTOMOLOGY

One Million Dollars to Fight One Little Bug

Trench Fighting, With Chemical Warfare, Will Be Used to Check Advance of Chinch Bug Hordes

CHINCH bugs have been added to the Midwest's agricultural troubles of drought, dust storms, depression, erosion, grasshoppers, unpaid taxes, and a congressional campaign in the offing. The Corn Belt farmer must surely, by now, have a fellow-feeling with the country folk of Egypt, groaning under the Ten Plagues of Moses.

The chinch bug is no minor plague, either, when he gets going. For though the individual insect is tiny—not more than about a fifth of an inch long—there are such uncountable billions of him that the horde moves like a living carpet, ruining every green thing it comes upon.

Normally, there are always a certain number of chinch bugs in the warmer parts of the great midwestern and western grain belt. But in a year favoring their rapid multiplication—combining as a rule a mild preceding winter, a dry spring and a hot, droughty summer—they increase beyond all imagination, and the damage they do to crops can hardly be surpassed even by locusts.

The individual chinch bug might be rated as an interesting little insect to study under a magnifying glass, if the collective manners of the species were not so evil in the sight of men. The chinch bug is rather slender, with dark body and glistening white wings, each with a dark oval spot. Its second or specific Latin name, leucopterus, means "white-winged."

Truly a Bug

Entomologists who protest when you try to call any insect a bug do not mind the chinch bug's being so called. For he is a real bug, in the strict sense of the word. That is, the chinch bug belongs to the great group of insects with piercing, sucking beaks instead of chewing mouths like those of grasshoppers. Insects thus equipped are called Hemiptera by the learned, and are the true bugs. Other members of the bug order are squash bugs, box-elder bugs, stink bugs, giant water bugs—and bed bugs.

The chinch bug does its feeding—and thus all its mischief—with its sharp little beak. It sinks that beak into the stalk of a green plant and proceeds to draw sap, just as its notorious domestic relative draws blood. And when several thousand of them get busy on a cornstalk—well, just imagine how you yourself might feel.

The chinch bug overwinters in the shelter of weeds and stubble on the ground. That is why a mild winter is apt to precede a bad chinch bug summer. In the spring it produces its first batch of progeny. These get to work on the early small grain and forage crops.

When the small grains and hay have been cut, and dry summer has arrived, the bugs leave their first homes and migrate to the green cornfields, where there is still sweet sap to be sucked. They travel along the ground, a living



THE LITTLE BAD CHINCH BUG

He is only about a fifth of an inch long, actually, but fighting him is going to cost Uncle Sam a million dollars this summer. That sum has been appropriated by Congress to aid in the endeavor to check the chinch bug depredations in the grainfields of the Midwest. As one of the 125 million citizens of this country, your share of this insect war-tax will be eight-tenths of one cent.

sheet of avid tiny appetites. Cornfields wilt before their advance, quite literally in a few minutes.

This is the stage that has now been reached throughout the corn belt—over most of Oklahoma, eastern Kansas and Nebraska, southern Iowa and the greater part of Missouri, all of Illinois, and southern Indiana. Here the Government's million dollars' worth of anti-bug munitions will be expended.

To check the advance of a chinch bug horde trench warfare is resorted to. Barrier ridges are plowed in its path. A strip of creosote is poured along their tops, and at intervals pits are sunk.

The bugs, repelled by the sticky, smelly creosote, run along the barriers and fall into the pits. There they can be killed with kerosene or by simply crushing them.

A chinch bug fight is no country-club tennis tournament; it is a dusty, dirty, messy business—a massacre in millions. But if the bugs succeed in breaking the line, it is the corn that gets massacred.

This summer, with the wheat crop so deeply cut by the drought, corn is precious and must not be lost.

Farmer and scientist, with spade and plow and creosote can, grimly face the enemy.

"They shall not pass."

Science News Letter, June 23, 1934

PUBLIC HEALTH

Infantile Paralysis Epidemic Still Growing

THE OUTBREAK of infantile paralysis, centering in California, is still growing. The latest figures, compiled by the U. S. Public Health Service, show 273 new cases in California for the week ending June 9. Cases reported throughout the rest of the country bring the week's total up to 294.

Steady advance of the outbreak has been marked through recent weeks, the new cases in the week of May 26 totaling 118, and in the week of June 2 totaling 178.

Los Angeles County and vicinity have been most seriously affected.

Public health officials are warning parents to keep children away from crowds where they may be exposed to the disease, and to watch for early symptoms when treatment is most effective.

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