

New collaborative trials to tackle soldier fly

New trials are looking to provide more information for growers on management strategies for soldier fly.



Adult sugarcane soldier flies – male (left) and female (right).

SRA has started a series of collaborative trials in four regions of the industry to look at management strategies to control the impacts of soldier fly.

The new trials have started over recent months and are in partnership with productivity services in the Bundaberg, Isis, Maryborough and Mackay growing regions, which are some of the regions that face the worst of the soldier fly problem.

The new trials come in response to an independent review in 2014 that looked at the soldier fly problem, along with what activity had taken place in the past, and subsequently made recommendations about what could be done in the future.

The review was also an SRA response to grower and industry concerns about the soldier fly problem.

The review was conducted by retired CSIRO entomologist Dr John Matthiessen.

Significant investment and research has occurred over the last 50 years to identify management options, but impacted growers have still continued to battle significant losses from the pest in some areas of the industry.

SRA Manager for Plant Health, Dr Andrew Ward leads the team at SRA responsible for the research and he said the new trials were about addressing gaps that were identified in the review.

“The purpose of the trials is to look at management strategies – and not just chemical controls – to manage and control soldier fly,” Dr Ward said.

“It is also looking at the tolerance of existing cane varieties and new SRA varieties to soldier fly. We want to evaluate new approaches to managing soldier fly.

“Although they are not a major pest of sugarcane as an Australian industry, they do cause significant economic losses to those growers who have to deal with them.”

Despite many years of research, management has been by cultural methods with no insecticides registered for their control. Cultural controls work well to prevent infestation of plant cane crops but re-infestation of ratoons is common; often requiring a plough-out and fallow after the second ratoon crop.

The trials at Maryborough, Bundaberg and Isis are looking at varieties and resistance, while three additional trials in Mackay and Bundaberg will look at ways of reducing the fly population.

Soldier flies are a native insect that naturally inhabit grasslands. They cause damage to cane through their larvae attacking the roots. They may also inject a toxin into the plant during feeding, but this has not been proven.

SRA will continue to update growers and millers on the progress of this research through **CaneConnection** and our regular eNewsletter.

For more information, contact Dr Andrew Ward on 0401 564 312 or email award@sugarresearch.com.au.

Severely damaged cane ratoons as a result of soldier fly.