

SRA Technician Jill Jennings at the Bundaberg chemical trial site in August 2016.

Research investigates options for soldier fly management

Current research activity is looking at new options for soldier fly management, including both chemical trials and variety trials. By Brad Pfeffer.

A series of research trials is investigating potential control and management options for soldier fly.

These trials are occurring in regions that have experienced some of the worst impacts of this pest, at Maryborough, Isis, Bundaberg and Mackay, and in collaboration with productivity services organisations and growers in those regions.

Soldier fly are not considered a major pest of sugarcane, but they can cause very severe damage for growers who have them, particularly to ratoon crops.

There has been extensive research into the pest in the past, but to date no control method exists outside of farm management strategies to reduce their population.



A female soldier fly.

The purpose of the new trials is to investigate practical and affordable alternatives.

SRA Senior Technician Jill Jennings is running several of the trials in the southern region, including variety trials at Maryborough, Isis and Bundaberg, and two chemical trials at Bundaberg. Similar trials are being conducted at Mackay by SRA Entomologist, Karel Lindsay and SRA Technician Allen Eaton.

“At the moment we don’t have chemicals or other options, and the only treatment strategy is to try and break the life cycle and reduce the population,” Ms Jennings said. “One purpose of the chemical trials is to see what happens if we apply an insecticide into the furrow at planting.

“Will that slow down the infestation in your plant crop? We have seen farmers with a big soldier fly problem having them in their plant crop and then they are losing their crop from the first ratoon, so that is a major cost.”

Chemical treatment at planting allows the chemical to be applied in a wider band than it would on ratoon crops.

Some of the chemicals being trialled are currently not registered for use in sugarcane, and are not disclosed because they are still to be assessed. Ratooning vigour and soldier fly numbers will be evaluated after harvest.

Cane treated with unregistered chemical will not be crushed. The variety trials are assessing varieties chosen by each region, with the objective of providing information to growers on varieties that may be more tolerant to soldier fly.

“We hope that this information will be useful for farmers if they are able to choose a variety that may be more tolerant over one that is more susceptible,” she said.

She added that there were still questions about how soldier fly actually impacted the crop and the ratoons, as the impact on the crop was not distinct like with cane grubs, for example. Soldier Fly suck on the roots, but why that impacts on ratooning is unclear.

More information on these trials will be communicated with industry as relevant information is available.