

EARLY POISONING FOR WEEVILS

D. R. Coker Points Out Value of Molasses Mixture for Campaign Against the Boll Weevil.

To the Editor:
I notice appearing in all of the daily and weekly papers this week an article from Clemson College purporting to give advice as to the latest and most approved methods of handling the boll weevil.

I am sorry to take issue with the weevil experts of the college on this matter but feel compelled to do so as my own experiments and those of many of the best farmers in the state lead me to differ from them in important particulars. Clemson college is supported principally by the farmers of South Carolina and I submit that where there is important evidence available from many of the best and most reliable farmers in the state, it should be given at least equal weight with that of the "experimenters in Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas and Oklahoma".

The boll weevil has been in South Carolina for several years during most of which time the government and college experts have advocated a method of weevil control which was expensive, which required much judgment in its application and which involved night work. Besides in practice last year the government method proved to be dangerous in that some crops were severely damaged by plant lice after two or three applications of the calcium arsenate in dust form.

I have abundant evidence that the early poisoning of the weevils by the molasses-calcium arsenate method is a success and is so cheap and simple that it can be put into universal practice. I think it a fair deduction from the results obtained that when put into universal practice, it will greatly delay the rapid increase of weevils and allow the whole crop to fruit for some time longer than when early control methods are not applied.

The experience of Mr. McDuffie, farm manager for ex-Governor R. I. Manning on his Meredith place, is sufficient on this subject although it is confirmed by practically every other farmer who used the molasses treatment in time. Mr. McDuffie poisoned his worst infested field of 10 acres on or about May 24, at which time there were no squares upon the cotton. Up to that time he had picked weevils from this field frequently and upon the day of poisoning was getting at the rate of about 200 weevils per acre. Mr. McDuffie poisoned this field several times between May 24 and June 27, on which day he told me that he had frequently and carefully examined this field during that interval (May 24 to June 27) and had sent hands into it to search for weevils, also that ex-Governor Manning had been with him on at least one occasion searching for weevils, that he had been unable to find a single live weevil in this field during that period, that he had been carefully over the field during the past few days and had found but two small spots in which any squares were being punctured. (These of course he had carefully picked up.) The cotton referred to was planted in March and was carried to the end of the period of weevil emergence with practically no infestation or damage. About one week later Mr. McDuffie told me that he had just plowed over a 65-acre field and had offered his plow hands 5c for each punctured square. They had turned in about 100 squares or 11-2 squares per acre.

I could quote Messrs. W. A. and Geo. Stuckey of Lee county; J. W. Goodson and R. P. Gillespie of Hartsville; A. H. Rogers of Society Hill, besides my own force of experimenters

and a host of other farmers in this section to the effect that applications of the molasses mixture applied for the first time from May 24 to June 12 and even later upon cotton which was at the time badly infested with weevils resulted in the prompt and practically total destruction of the weevils. It is hardly reasonable to suppose that the weevils chose the particular date of May 24 to disappear from the fields of ex-Governor Manning, May 30 from the fields of Mr. Goodson and June 12 from our own fields (these being the dates upon which these three parties made the first application of poison.)

It seems to me no less foolhardy to do nothing to control the boll weevil until squares have formed on the plants and of course some of them been punctured by the old weevils. It is perfectly feasible as stated by the Clemson authority to kill these early weevils by applications of arsenical poison. Why is it not equally feasible to keep on killing them for a period of 30 days when a method which will certainly do this is offered at a cost of about 20c per acre per application for materials, or say \$1 per acre to complete the job? The experience of many in this section shows that it is perfectly feasible to do this very thing.

We are not going to get perfect boll weevil control anywhere this season because in no section have all the farmers poisoned their crops and picked up squares, nor will we probably get weevil control to the highest degree in any season, even in sections where the molasses poison is used in time and frequently, unless the farmers are vigilant in finding the spots where the few weevils who have probably escaped the poison are laying in the squares.

I firmly believe, however, that when every farmer in the state poisons his cotton before squares are formed and continues this treatment often enough to keep the poison on the cotton until the last of June and where he continues vigilant in detecting and picking up the few punctured squares that the occasional unpoisoned weevil will lay, we will have a method of control which will protect the whole cotton crop until late in the season and allow normal crops of early planted early varieties to mature.

In order to secure the universal adoption of an agricultural practice it is only necessary to convince all the farmers that the practice is profitable. The use of the Williamson plan of cultivating corn very quickly became universal in this section because its benefits were so manifest that even the powerful opposition of many government experts and agricultural advisers could not stop its spread. The use of fertilizers is universal in the eastern part of the belt.

The general adoption of some method of boll weevil control at once cheap, simple and practical enough to come within the means and appeal to the common sense of every farmer should be much easier than either the Williamson plan or the use of fertilizer, because every farmer has direct and vital interest in preventing his neighbors from raising weevils which will destroy his own top crop and thus will use his influence to see that his neighbors use control methods.

I am in hearty concurrence with Clemson college and the government in their advice to plant early, use early varieties, use acid phosphate, cultivate rapidly, pick up squares and destroy the old stalks some time before frost. I must continue, however, to advise the use of a control method which has carried up to July 15 with practically no damage to those crops to which it had been applied before squares formed and which has carried our own crops (originally badly infested) up to the same date with much less than 5 per cent infestation although the first application was not made until many of the first squares had been punctured.

It should be noted that in this section we have had only one period (from June 6 to June 18) which was favorable for boll weevil control. The balance of the growing season has been showery with many heavy rains, making control methods extremely difficult and more expensive than normal. The total rainfall at Hartsville from Jan. 1 to date has been 39.7. The May rainfall (which mostly fell during the latter half of the month) was 4.53; June, 7.79 and July (up to and including 13th inst.) 3.80.

I have great respect for the work of Clemson college. Its president, director of extension and many of its professors are personal friends. In regard to boll weevil control, however, I must accept the evidence of my own eyes and that of my own experimental organization and of reliable farmers in this section who are also my personal friends.

D. R. COKER.
Hartsville, July 15, 1922.

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