



Ice versus insects

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Every year, there are a few calls about “mysterious” insect damage that turns out to be hail damage. Here are a few quick tips that add up to damage from ice versus insects.

Distribution of damage in space. The damage is found at a constant level across the entire field. In contrast, insect damage is often patchy, worse in some areas than others, or concentrated along edges or in areas of poor crop growth.

Distribution of damage in time. Leaves with damage are of a similar age (hit at same time with hail), while new growth is not affected. In contrast, with an insect infestation, you would expect at least some new growth to be damaged. In some cases (for example, aphids), insects actually concentrate on juicy new growth.

Damage to neighboring crops, weeds. The same type of damage is found on larger weeds in the field, on plants along the edge of the field, and in neighboring, especially different, crops. This indicates a widespread event affecting many plants, i.e., hail.

Lack of consumption. Leaves may be tattered, torn and ripped, but leaf tissue itself is not necessarily missing. The tattered leaf can often be “reconstructed” by aligning the tears. In contrast, feeding by defoliating insects removes leaf tissue.

Lack of bugs or signs. No insects are found, or at least consistently found, associated with the damage. There is also a lack of cast skins, frass (bug droppings), slime trails, or other signs that insects were present.

And of course, coffee talk. The talk in the coffee shop is about the recent thunderstorms, not about armyworms and beetles.

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