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Soybean Insect Management: Pod Feeders

Leaf feeding insects in soybeans often *look* like they're doing more damage than they actually are. Damage by pod feeders, on the other hand, can go unnoticed but deserves scouting attention. Three problematic species are bean leaf beetles, stink bugs, and soybean podworm.

Bean leaf beetles pose a dual threat to soybeans – feeding on foliage *and* pods – but it's the latter we are most concerned about. Bean leaf beetles often feed on the lining of the soybean pod, and while this scarring may not seem like a huge issue, it can provide an entry point for diseases. Treatments may be economically justified if pod feeding results in the loss of three or more seeds per plant, pods are not completely dry, or beetles are not yet leaving the fields.

Stink bug pod feeding damage has been an increasing concern in recent years. Unlike the bean leaf beetle, it feeds on the seed itself rather than just the pod, causing potential yield losses and seed quality (shrunken/deformed) concerns as well. Control measures should be considered when 10 bugs per 30 foot of row are found.

Soybean podworm (corn earworm) is the most common larval pod feeding pest this time of year. They consume the developing seed, causing *direct* damage to the grain. Control measures should be considered when an average of one small worm per foot of row is detected.

Other insects (grasshoppers, etc...) may cause some level of pod injury as well, and scouting is key to making good treatment decisions. Simply seeing the insect doesn't necessarily justify treatment, but it is a good indicator to implement scouting. For more information on scouting or treatment recommendations, check out the 2026 KSU Soybean Insect Management Guide available online at: https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/download/soybean-insect-pest-management-2026_MF743 or upon request via any District Extension Office.