KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY | Extension
Meadowlark District

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Insecticide Insurance?

Making the most of any field pass is good management. Why spend two passes doing what you can do in one? Its simple economics and economics are as important as ever.

Insecticide applications in corn and soybeans have always been one of 'competing' economic considerations. Is there value in them (there can be)? Should I try to combine it with an application pass to cut down on costs (makes sense…)? Will the optimum application window for insect pressure match when I'm already making a pass (sometimes…not always…)? Is an insecticide even needed? While there are no 'one size fits all' answers, one study from Ohio State University may help with the process of determining the need for insecticide insurance.

In it, Soybean and Small Grains Professor Dr. Laura Lindsey conducted two years of field trials (10 environments) looking at the value of foliar insecticide applications during the reproductive stage. Looking mainly at stink bugs and bean leaf beetles, her team found that even when combining species, treatment threshold levels were seldom reached. Insecticide treatment comparisons (no treatment, R3, and R5) also resulted in no yield response, affirming that preventative applications are of limited value.

Beyond economic considerations, Lindsey also noted other potential consequences to unnecessary applications, including potential increases in insecticide resistance (reducing the effectiveness of future applications) and the elimination of helpful prey insects (for example: reductions in lady beetle populations helping with aphid control). In addition, while soybeans don't require pollinator insects, there is some indication pollinators might be beneficial to helping increase seeds per pod counts and seed weight – potential *helps* to soybean yield.

While this research echoes the advice of many Extension Entomologists, they would *all* encourage scouting. It's not always an enjoyable in-season task, but sampling beyond field edges to get an accurate assessment of field wide insect pressure is key. Combined with treatment thresholds (the 2026 KSU Soybean Insect Management Guide has guidelines for bean leaf beetles, stink bugs, spider mites, etc…), in-season scouting is the best way to make sure an insecticide application – stand alone or in combination with another field pass – is more about efficacy than insurance.

Request a copy of the Soybean Insect Management Guide at any District Office, via e-mail (dhallaue@ksu.edu) or online at: https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/soybean-insect-pest-management-2026_MF743.pdf .