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Protect Your Crop: Simple Guide to Pest Identification & Management

Authors

Lekshmi Jeeva Kasiviswanathan[1*], Devbratha Pradhan[2], Kamal Yadav[3], Nisha Yadav[4], Durgesh Kumar Maurya[5]

[1]Assistant Professor, Department of Agricultural Entomology, College of Agricultural Technology, Theni

[2]Assistant Professor-cum-Junior-Scientist, Department of Natural Resource Management, Faculty of Forestry, Birsa Agricultural University, Kanke, Ranchi

[3]Research Scholar, Department of Entomology, School of Agricultural Sciences, Medziphema, Nagaland University, Nagaland

[4]Research Scholar, Department of Agricultural Extension, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel University of Agriculture and Technology, Meerut, Uttar Pradesh

[5]SMS, Department of Agronomy, Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Sant Kabir Nagar, Acharya Narendra Deva University of Agriculture and Technology, Kumarganj, Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh

INTRODUCTION

Crop pests are one of the major constraints to agricultural production. Insects, mites, nematodes, rodents and other harmful organisms can damage crops at different stages of growth and cause significant yield and quality losses. Early identification of pests and timely management are essential for protecting crops and reducing unnecessary expenditure on pesticides. Pest management involves identifying the pest correctly, understanding its damage, monitoring its population and selecting suitable control measures. Integrated Pest Management (IPM) combines cultural, mechanical, biological and chemical methods to achieve effective, economical and environmentally safe pest control.

Understanding Crop Pests

Crop pests are organisms that cause economic damage to agricultural crops. They may attack roots, stems, leaves, flowers, fruits, seeds or stored produce.

Major Types of Crop Pests

1. Chewing Pests

• Caterpillars, beetles and grasshoppers feed directly on plant tissues.

• They cause holes, defoliation and damage to young shoots.

2. Sucking Pests

• Aphids, jassids, whiteflies, thrips and mealybugs suck plant sap.

• They cause yellowing, curling, wilting and stunted growth.

3. Boring Pests

• Stem borers, fruit borers and shoot borers enter plant tissues

• They cause dead hearts, hollow stems and holes in fruits or shoots.

4. Soil Pests

• Termites, white grubs and cutworms attack roots and underground plant parts.

• They can cause wilting, poor establishment and plant death.

How to Identify Crop Pests

Correct identification is the first step in effective pest management.

• Regularly inspect crops and surrounding areas.

• Check both upper and lower surfaces of leaves.

• Examine stems, shoots, flowers, fruits and roots for pest presence.

• Observe the type and pattern of crop damage.

• Record the pest species, population and affected crop stage.

• Use photographs, field guides or expert advice when identification is difficult.

Common Pest Damage Symptoms

Damage Symptom	Possible Pest Group
Holes and chewed leaves	Caterpillars, beetles
Leaf curling and yellowing	Aphids, jassids
White or silvery patches	Thrips
Honeydew and sooty mould	Aphids, whiteflies
Holes in stems	Stem borers
Damaged fruits	Fruit and shoot borers
Wilting and poor growth	Root and soil pests

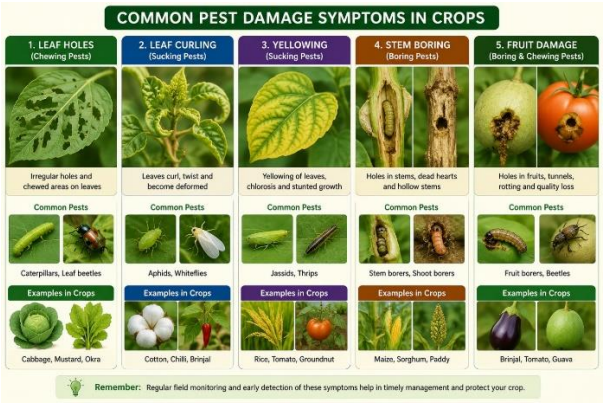

Figure 1. Common pest damage symptoms in crops, including leaf holes, curling, yellowing, stem boring and fruit damage.

Economic Threshold Level (ETL)

• Economic Threshold Level is the pest population level at which management action should be initiated

• Farmers should avoid unnecessary pesticide application when pest populations are below the economic threshold.

• ETL-based management reduces production costs and protects beneficial insects.

• Regular monitoring helps farmers take timely control decisions.

Monitoring and Surveillance

Regular monitoring helps detect pests before they cause serious damage.

• Field scouting and direct observation.

• Yellow sticky traps for monitoring flying sucking pests.

• Pheromone traps for specific insect pests.

• Light traps for monitoring nocturnal insects

• Regular recording of pest population and damage levels.

Integrated Pest Management (IPM): A Smart Approach

IPM is an ecological approach that combines different pest management methods to keep pest populations below economically damaging levels.

1. Prevention

• Use healthy and quality seed.

• Select resistant or tolerant varieties where available.

• Maintain proper field sanitation.

• Follow recommended crop spacing and balanced fertilization.

2. Cultural Control

• Follow timely sowing and harvesting.

• Practice crop rotation.

• Remove and destroy infested plant parts.

• Use intercropping and trap crops where suitable.

• Maintain proper field sanitation.

3. Biological Control

• Conserve natural enemies such as ladybird beetles, lacewings, spiders and parasitoids

• Use microbial biopesticides such as Bacillus thuringiensis, Beauveria bassiana and Metarhizium where recommended.

• Avoid unnecessary broad-spectrum pesticide applications.

4. Mechanical and Physical Control

• Handpick and destroy insect pests and egg masses.

• Use sticky traps, pheromone traps and light traps.

• Remove severely infested plant parts.

• Use suitable physical barriers and field sanitation practices.

5. Chemical Control

• Use pesticides only when necessary and when pest populations reach the recommended threshold.

• Select pesticides according to the target pest and crop.

• Follow the recommended dose, timing and application method.

• Rotate pesticides with different modes of action to delay resistance development.

Safe Use of Pesticides

• Read and follow the pesticide label carefully

• Use the recommended dose and spray volume.

• Wear appropriate protective equipment during application.

• Avoid spraying during strong winds or unsuitable weather.

• Follow the recommended waiting period before harvesting.

• Keep pesticides away from children, animals and food materials.

• Dispose of empty containers safely and responsibly.

Benefits of Integrated Pest Management

✓ Reduces crop losses and improves yield.

✓ Reduces unnecessary pesticide use and production costs.

✓ Conserves beneficial insects and natural enemies.

✓ Reduces pesticide residues and environmental pollution.

✓ Delays development of pesticide resistance.

✓ Promotes safe and sustainable crop production.

Important Tips for Farmers

• Know your pest before controlling it.

• Inspect fields regularly and identify pests at an early stage.

• Monitor pest populations before applying pesticides.

• Follow ETL-based pest management wherever recommendations are available.

• Prefer preventive, cultural and biological methods.

• Use pesticides as a last option and only at recommended doses.

• Maintain records of pest occurrence and management practices.

CONCLUSION

Timely identification and proper management of crop pests are essential for protecting crops, reducing yield losses and maintaining profitable agriculture. Farmers should regularly monitor their fields, recognize characteristic pest damage and take action according to pest population and economic threshold levels. Integrated Pest Management provides a balanced approach by combining preventive, cultural, biological, mechanical and chemical methods. Proper identification and responsible pest management not only protect crops but also conserve beneficial organisms, reduce environmental risks and support sustainable agricultural production.