

Innovative moth attractant to control major crop pest

A new moth attractant, Magnet Insect Attractant Technology has just been given government approval for commercial use on cotton, beans and sweet corn. Magnet is a world-first product, developed in Australia, targeting the elusive adult (moth) stage of the destructive *Helicoverpa* (heliiothis) caterpillar pest.

Magnet is a formulation containing a patented blend of plant volatiles and sugars that mimic flowering, nectar rich plants. Moths seeking a sugar food source find the Magnet blend highly attractive. It is applied to less than two per cent of a farmer's crop in narrow strips, attracting moths to feed on the product which is laced with small quantities of insecticide.

Controlling the moth stage results in up to 90 per cent reduction in eggs laid. The

subsequent reduction in caterpillar numbers means less damage to crops and greatly reduced need for farmers to spray broadacre insecticides.

The registration of Magnet by the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority is the outcome of 10 years of laboratory and field research by Professor Peter Gregg and Dr Alice Del Socorro from the University of New England, working in the Cotton Catchment Communities CRC in conjunction with Ag Biotech Australia Pty Ltd.

Professor Gregg said that Magnet can be used as a selective control using tiny amounts of cheap broad-spectrum insecticides, without the destruction of beneficial insects which normally accompanies use of these chemicals. The plant volatiles are equivalent

to naturally occurring compounds, and are already used in the food industry.

"Major losses are caused by heliothis caterpillars, about \$200 million for grains, fibre, fruit and vegetable farmers every year," he said.

"Previously, the mobility of these moths has been a threat. Populations build up in nearby or distant crops and non-crop vegetation, and then invade in numbers which overwhelm the beneficial insects present in a crop. Farmers then have to apply a cover spray over the whole field, often destroying the beneficial insects. But Magnet targets the mobile stage and can reduce moth populations over a wide area. This converts their mobility from a threat to an opportunity for pest management", said Professor Gregg.

Dr Del Socorro, who migrated to Australia from the Philippines after studying at the University of New England and has worked with the Cotton CRC for many years, sees considerable potential for the use of Magnet in other countries and for other crops.

"Heliiothis and similar moths are significant pests throughout south-east Asia", she said.

"We are already trialling this technology in overseas countries. It also has potential uses with insect-resistant transgenic cotton, which now dominates the Australian cotton industry. It could be used to slow the development of resistance by the pests to this type of cotton."

More information on Magnet please contact Professor Peter Gregg on 02 6799 2451 or 0427 727 931.



Alice Del Socorro and Peter Gregg.



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