

news | now's the time to hit porina

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If Porina caterpillars run true to form an increased challenge can be expected this year says Nufarm NZ Territory Manager Mike Cox.

"Moist summer conditions and good pasture cover allow more porina eggs and young larvae to survive and grow. So farmers should be particularly vigilant this season" he warns.

Nufarm markets Dimilin, an insect growth regulator that prevents porina caterpillars from moulting and causes them to die in their burrows.

The company says that unlike organophosphate sprays, this product is virtually non-toxic to humans, stock, earthworms and birds. And it is relatively persistent on pasture, suffering little wash-off or breakdown.

Now is the time to spray this pest, especially in Canterbury, to minimise pasture damage, Cox says. "Revenge spraying – killing caterpillars after they have blitzed the pasture – may cause a farmer to feel OK but it doesn't do any practical good".

Wherever there has been any grass length, correctly timed preventative spraying will kill porina caterpillars which otherwise will chew off the grass at ground level and drag it underground. Porina are voracious night feeders and 40 of them per square meter can eat as much grass as 1.8 stock units.

"Timing is the key to effective spraying: observing moth flights is the practical step to getting it right" Cox says.

Common peak flights occur October-November in early flight areas (typically Canterbury) and in January-March in late flight areas (typically Wairarapa). Ten to 12 weeks after the flight is the time to watch for porina caterpillar populations in their burrows.

A simple population-monitoring method farmers can use is the board technique, as follows:

- * Survey paddocks at risk
- * Take ten 32cm x 32cm boards (ten boards = 1sq.m).
- * Use spade to clear smooth and level sites for boards.
- * Place boards at random throughout paddock.
- * Count tunnels under boards next day.

It is best to use Dimilin early in the season against young caterpillars to avoid severe pasture damage later. Small caterpillars are easier and quicker to kill because they are more sensitive and moult more often.

"Porina are difficult to control because they are irregular feeders" Cox says. They may come up to feed only once a week. Conventional insecticides which last only a few days may miss most of the population.

Provided Dimilin is not grazed off, it stays on the foliage up to two weeks after spraying.

Dimilin is proven effective at 50g per hectare at a cost of about \$10/ha plus \$16-20+GST/ha application, compared with \$40-60/ha for an organophosphate plus application.

For more information e-mail us for a brochure or visit the product section.