

Tackling the tentacled pest



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CATHERINE WHALEY

With oilseed rape creeping back into rotations, plus the ever-looming threat of wash-out UK weather conditions, slugs could soon slime their way into proliferation across many farms. However, there’s a new molluscicide in the toolbox which promises to stop them in their tracks. *CPM* reports...

By Janine Adamson

The past exceptionally arid season aside, in many instances, UK arable land provides the perfect environment for slugs to not only survive, but thrive. From wetter, warmer winters to an increase in brassica-rich cover crops and leys in rotations, farms have evolved into a bountiful sanctuary for those of the gastropod world.

As with many crop pests, control options are limited, with just one existing active ingredient available to deploy once integrated pest management tactics have been utilised. However, following the launch of a new molluscicide from Adama, the tide could finally turn on these tentacled tyrants.

“Generally, slugs have been gradually increasing in pressure during the years, to a point where populations are significant – up to 60 slugs/m² in some places,” highlights the firm’s Melanie Wardle. “Although they might not be front of mind following the extreme drought conditions of last season, they are for many growers, an unrelenting pest.

“So while ferric phosphate and alternative biological control products continue to have a place, we wanted to launch a product that would offer a step-up in slug control and address some of the drawbacks that farmers can face when using slug pellets.”

The product in question is Ferrabait, a complex formulation of 12 components including new active ingredient feralla (elemental iron). Adama’s Catherine Whaley explains that because feralla is toxic to slugs, it causes rapid cessation of feeding.

“Once ingested, the elemental iron in Ferrabait is solubilised which leads to pathological changes in the slug’s digestive system and organs. This causes feeding to stop almost immediately, with mortality soon following.

“Critically, this process is rapid. During controlled field trials using brassica seedlings, compared with two leading competitor products, grey field slugs were controlled within 48-hours following the ingestion of Ferrabait. This was

well ahead of the competitor products being screened,” she continues.

“In terms of crop status, the untreated plots experienced 45% feeding damage after three days. But, the trial data indicates that by using Ferrabait, this is reduced by 95%.”

Other benefits of the formulation come from the inclusion of wheat flours for optimum pellet palatability, and humic acid to stimulate feeding. According to Catherine, another hurdle to overcome in the pellet’s development has been prolonging its efficacy when used in inclement conditions.

“The pellets must remain intact in wet weather, which is of course when slugs



Stopping slugs in their tracks

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Wireworm network seeks collaborators

A platform that aims to join up the industry's response to the threat of wireworm is looking for new partners

The European Wireworm Research Network (EWRN) brings together researchers, agronomists and industry stakeholders to accelerate understanding and management of wireworm across European cropping systems. Its aim is to improve knowledge sharing, coordinate research priorities and support practical solutions for growers.

To support a faster and more joined-up response, EWRN is seeking researchers, growers, and other industry professionals from crop protection companies, breeders, agronomy services, processors and supply chain organisations, to join the network.

It will then establish four technical working groups to bring together expertise from across Europe, to coordinate work to address the challenges posed by the widespread damage from wireworms.

With closer engagement, this should help identify the scale of the issue in different crops and regions, and accelerate the transfer of practical solutions to growers, says independent agronomist, Martyn Cox.

"Wireworm is no longer a localised or background problem – it's a growing threat to arable rotations across Europe. By bringing researchers, agronomists and industry together, we can build the knowledge base we require and ensure practical tools reach farmers quickly."

EWRN's most recent online workshop attracted strong attendance and positive feedback, reflecting the scale of interest and urgency from both research and industry, adds Martyn.

Those interested in joining the EWRN or participating in a working group are invited to register their interest at potatowireworms.com/member-area or email potato.wireworms@gmail.com



Collaborators wanted

Martyn Cox is urging individuals to join the European Wireworm Research Network.



Usability

Ferrabait pellets can be used with a range of commonly used applicators, with an online calibration tool currently being developed to assist with ballistic settings.

are most active. Additionally, if a product moulds then slugs won't eat it," she says.

Conversely, Ferrabait has been developed using Adama's 'desidro' wet processing and two-stage drying technology, which is also a feature of the firm's Gusto Iron (anhydrous ferric phosphate) slug pellets.

"This proven manufacturing system produces pellets with the ideal balance of persistence in wet weather and palatability over a longer duration. This means Ferrabait pellets remain mould-free and attractive for longer than other slug baits."

To demonstrate this in action through trials, 4mm of simulated rainfall was applied to Ferrabait pellets and two competitor products for 10 days. Catherine highlights that because of Ferrabait's coating, the pellets

remained clear and therefore active for ingestion by slugs, while the competitor products both developed mould.

Moving on to baiting point optimisation, she says being 2.5mm by 2.1mm, Ferrabait pellets spread accurately to wide operating widths, providing the ideal number of baiting points (40-50 pellets per m²) when applied at typical field rates. They can also be used with a wide range of commonly used applicators, with an online calibration tool currently being developed to assist with ballistic settings, she points out.

"In contrast, smaller 'mini' pellets have a larger comparative surface area and therefore tend to degrade more rapidly in wet conditions. They also don't spread as accurately at wider spreading widths, while larger pellets provide too few baiting points," comments Catherine.

She stresses that to be effective, ultimately, a slug pellet must be attractive and palatable. "We know that 70% of slugs feed within 90 minutes of Ferrabait application, which is why knock-down is so fast for this product.

"It also takes less than one pellet to provide a lethal dose, with the rest remaining for the next slug to ingest, which is very efficient. This is a key, unique selling point of Ferrabait's performance."

According to Catherine, the product

is 'much more than a new active ingredient'. "With superior palatability, it simply really appeals to slugs."

Looking at on-farm experience, with extreme arid conditions making last year a relative non-starter in terms of slug abundance, information is currently limited. However, among those asked to trial the product is Ceres Rural's Ed Thompson – also a member of the Association of Independent Crop Consultants (AICC).

Reflecting on the importance of gaining a new active ingredient, he says with a general desire to push wheat margins and the uncertainty of future SFI options, farmers are rightly looking to introduce more break crops into their rotations. "But, there are three or four slug species which can significantly impact germination and establishment, particularly after crops such as OSR.

"As an agronomist, having the option of different active ingredients and pellet shapes offers the opportunity to target slugs at the right time, increasing the likelihood of successfully establishing the crop," he comments.

Ferrabait will be available for use on farm from autumn 2026, with an authorisation for application across all edible and non-edible crops. The maximum individual dose rate will be 8kg/ha, for up to six treatments a year. ●