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Memorandum

To: Trialists

Fr: Curtis Meinert

Re: More counting at Cal Pac

My other counting job at Cal Pac (see previous posting on aphid counting) was counting European corn borer egg masses.

Ever notice how everything bad for us is from somewhere else? European corn borers, Japanese beetles, Asian killer hornets?

Makes you wonder.

Corn borers are products of moths. Eggs are deposited on the underside of corn leaves.

Larvae burrow into stalks, weakening them and causing them to break. One or two larvae in stalks is tolerable, but larvae in corn ears is not!

The counting protocol was about the same as for pea aphids; five plants at each corner and five in the center, but walking was easier than in counting pea aphids.

But this story is about what came after counting. It is my contribution to Rachel Carson's Silent Spring.

Infested fields were sprayed with DDT (dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane). I am sure now you would be dressed in hazmat suits. But not then! No gloves. No special gear. Nothing.

A sprayer crew consisted of an operator and a water hauler. The hauler had a 55 gallon drum of DDT and a 1,000 gallon water tank on a flatbed truck. The hauler's job was to be ready when the operator came in for refills.

Spraying morning til night, odds are sooner or later during the day the tractor will start "singing" to you. When that happened you slapped yourself awake, but if you dozed off, chances are when you came to there would be a patch of flattened corn behind you.

If you cannot kill the borers, kill the corn!

There were three sprayer crews. All three operators were accomplished bullshitters, so you had trouble sorting fact from fiction when they came in to report their acreage for the day.

Sprayers are designed to go through grown corn. Operators sit above the corn, about 8' off the ground.

The spray is from booms behind the tractor with drops for covering eight rows. Turning is tricky, especially at ends with fences. Swing wide, you hook the fence with the boom or a drop and you have troubles!

If you are in competition, you need a hauler like you see in pit crews at race tracks.

During my last year at Cal Pac I had a hauler who slept until I pulled up for refills. After a few days of that the fix was for him to ride in the jump seat behind me until I was about ready for a refill.

After the refill he was back in the jump seat. Hoofing it back to the truck when I was on my last round before needing a refill.

About half way through the second fill this particular day we find ourselves standing on the ground, looking at each other befuddled.

The problem? The back wheel of the sprayer came off and we spilled to the ground.

Needless to say we did not win the competition that day.

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For the record, the Environmental Protection Agency banned DDT in 1972 because of its impact on wildlife and human health risks. The ban was propelled by Rachel Carson's 1962 "Silent Spring".