

(A No. 160) Integrated Pest Management (IPM): Protecting Crops While Saving Costs

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ABSTRACT

This final article focuses on Agricultural Entomology, providing a strategic framework for managing insect populations without relying solely on expensive and toxic chemicals. It introduces the concept of Integrated Pest Management (IPM), which emphasizes the balance between "Pests" and "Beneficial Insects." The discussion categorizes pests based on their feeding habits—Sucking Pests (like aphids and whiteflies) versus Chewing Pests (like caterpillars and beetles)—and explains how these habits dictate the choice of control. A major section is dedicated to the Economic Threshold Level (ETL), teaching farmers how to count pests and only spray when the cost of damage exceeds the cost of treatment. The article also highlights the critical role of "Farmers' Friends," such as ladybugs, lacewings, and predatory wasps, which provide free pest control services. Finally, it addresses modern 2026 technologies, including pheromone traps for monitoring and the use of botanical extracts like Neem. By shifting from "pest eradication" to "pest management," farmers can protect their health, the environment, and their profit margins.

A To kill a pest, you must know how it eats. This determines which insecticide will work.

- **Chewing Pests:** Insects like Grasshoppers, Fall Armyworm, and

- **Sucking Pests:** Insects like Aphids, Whiteflies, and Jassids have "straw-like" mouths to suck sap. This causes leaves to curl, yellow, or wilt. They also spread plant viruses.

- **Treatment:**

Because they don't eat the leaf surface, you need "Systemic Insecticides" that are absorbed *into* the plant's sap.

**The Golden Rule:
Economic
Threshold Level
(ETL)**

The biggest mistake in farming is "Recreational Spraying"—spraying just because you see a few bugs.



Beetles have mandibles to bite and swallow plant tissue.

- **Treatment:** They are best controlled by "Stomach Poisons" applied to the leaf surface.

- **What is ETL?** It is the pest population density at which control measures should be started to prevent the population from reaching the **Economic Injury Level (EIL)**.





- **Example:** For many crops, the ETL for Aphids might be "20 aphids per leaf." If you only have 5 per leaf, your "Beneficial Insects" (like Ladybugs) will likely eat them for free. If you spray too early, you kill the ladybugs, and the aphids will return even faster.

The IPM Pyramid: Four Layers of Defense

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is like building a house of defense:

1. **Cultural Control (The Base):** Crop rotation, deep summer plowing to expose pupae to the sun, and "Trap Cropping" (planting a row of marigolds or mustard to lure pests away from your main crop).
2. **Mechanical Control:** Using yellow sticky traps for whiteflies, blue traps for thrips, or pheromone traps to "confuse" male moths so they cannot mate.
3. **Biological Control:** Releasing "Bio-agents" like *Trichogramma* wasps or using *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt), a natural bacteria that kills caterpillars but is safe for humans.
4. **Chemical Control (The Tip):** Use chemicals only when the first three layers fail.

Protecting the "Farmers' Friends"

For every 1 pest insect, there are often 10 "beneficial" insects in a healthy field.

- **Ladybird Beetles:** A single ladybug can eat thousands of aphids in its lifetime.
- **Syrphid Flies & Lacewings:** Their larvae are voracious predators of soft-bodied pests.
- **Pollinators:** Bees and butterflies are essential for fruit and seed set.
- **Action Step:** If you must spray, do it in the **late evening** when bees are not active, and choose "selective" chemicals that don't kill everything.

Managing Resistance: The Red Queen Effect

Insects reproduce very fast. If you use the same chemical (e.g., Imidacloprid) every week, the few

insects that survive will breed a "super-colony" that is immune to that spray.

- **Rotate the "IRAC" Class:** Check the label for the "IRAC" number. Never use the same number twice in a row.
- **Use Neem Oil:** Botanical pesticides like Neem have multiple modes of action, making it very hard for insects to develop resistance.

2026 Technology: Pheromones and Drones

Today, entomology uses high-tech tools:

- **Pheromone Monitoring:** Putting a "sex-scent" in a trap. If you catch 5 moths in one night, you know an outbreak is coming in 10 days.
- **Drone Spraying:** Drones can target "hotspots" in a field rather than spraying the whole 50 acres, saving you 70% in chemical costs.

Conclusion

Entomology is about balance. A farm is a small ecosystem. By scouting your fields regularly, identifying your pests correctly, and protecting your beneficial insects, you can grow a cleaner, healthier, and more profitable crop.

