

Pests

Beet Armyworm

Beet Armyworm

Spodoptera exigua

Introduction

This is a new threat to the beet crop in 2026, likely due to the extreme dry and heat during the summer. Moths and caterpillars were first seen in the south-west in fodder and energy beet crops and worked their way across to the sugar beet growing area.

Identification

Moths: Mottled grey and brown forewings with irregular light bands and a small bean shaped spot. Hindwings white or grey with a dark line at the margin. Moths measure 25-32mm.

Caterpillars: Colours vary from pale green to nearly black. Five pairs of fleshy prolegs at back end of body. Fine stripes often run down the back and along each side. Lines of white spots are visible along side of the body. Larvae measure up to 30mm long. FERA have produced a guide showing the differences between Beet armyworm and Silver Y caterpillars. This can be viewed [here](#). Caterpillars are unlikely to survive overwinter in the UK

Eggs: Spherical, ribbed eggs are laid in clusters and covered in a white cotton like layer of scales.



Beet armyworm larvae and leaf damage



Leaf damage from Beet armyworm

Damage

Young larvae feed in groups and create characteristic 'window pane' damage by grazing leaf surfaces. Older caterpillars chew irregular holes, skeletonizing leaves and can completely defoliate plants.

Control

Chemical control options are limited with pyrethroids being the only option available for control of beet armyworm caterpillars. Spray in the evening when caterpillars are actively feeding to ensure maximum contact of insecticide. If you are required to treat a crop, remember to follow rates, water volumes and harvest intervals of each product as stated on the label. BBRO is currently investigating the resistance status of specimens to pyrethroids as mixed reports of their control are being received.

Help identifying beet armyworm is available through the BBRO Plant Clinic. We encourage you to use this service as this pest is a new issue in 2026 and we are keen to gather information on its impact.