

## What the H\*#& is head-clipping my wheat? Chris DiFonzo, MSU

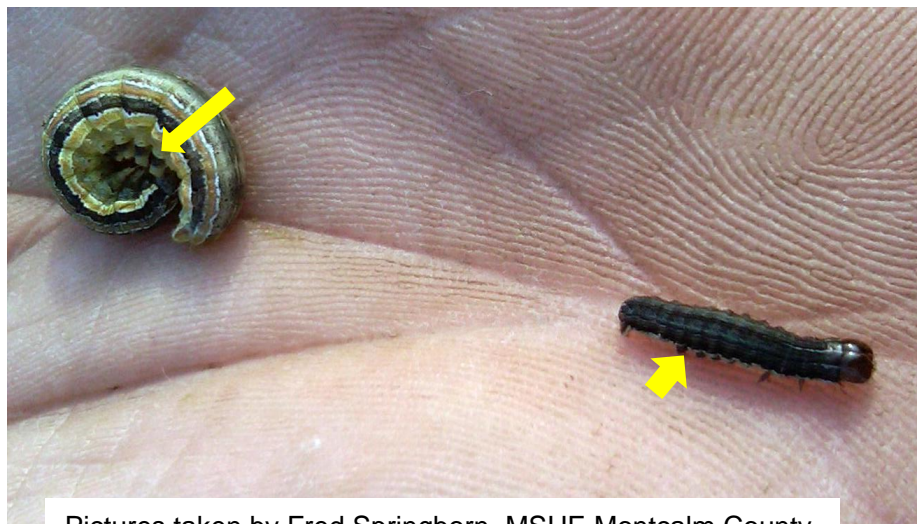
On 11 June 2010, Fred Springborn (MSUE Montcalm County) reported head-clipping in wheat. Pictures are below. There are armyworms in the field, although they seem too small and too few to head clip, and the wheat leaves aren't fed on as much as I expected. However, armyworm is the only species present in these fields. Hours later, a similar message came from Tracey Baute (Ontario Ministry of Ag), describing exactly the same damage as Fred reported. I don't know for sure which insect is doing the clipping, but on the second page of this sheet, I provide information on three potential culprits: true armyworm, grass sawfly, and wheathead armyworm.

The armyworm threshold at heading (2 per square foot) builds in a cushion for head-clipping, and can be used in this situation. There are many beneficial insects that eat or parasitize caterpillars in wheat. Although many people report finding armyworms this week, thus far I have had no reports of numbers actually over threshold.



Despite the difference in color, both caterpillars in this picture, found in a Montcalm County wheat field, are armyworms (arrows point to dark bars on prolegs).

So far, armyworms are the only caterpillars found in the Michigan fields with head clipping.

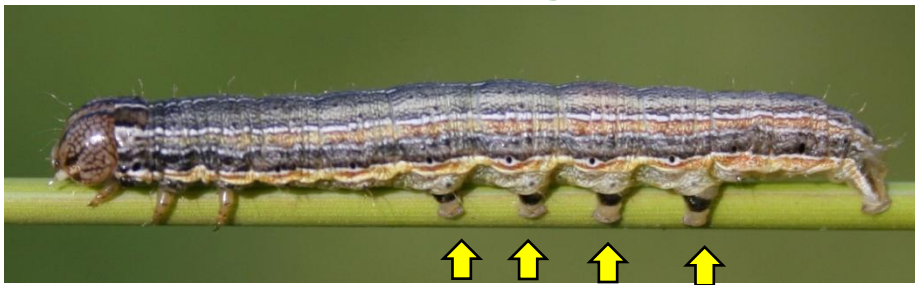


## Potential culprits for head-clipping

### True Armyworm

Reported this season in many locations in both wheat and corn, but generally not over threshold.

As of today (Friday June 11), larvae were about  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch (still have a ways to go – full grown AW are 1.5 inches)



ID: Distinct DARK BARS on the PROLEGS

Right - Pictures from an AW infestation in 2007 (Sanilac) with head-clipping.

Note the large size (penny in pic) of the caterpillars that did the clipping (1 inch or larger), and the lack of leaves on the wheat. Caterpillars ate the leaves first, then fed on stems as food ran out, resulting in head clipping. In 2007, clipping occurred in mid-June.



### Grass Sawfly

NOT a caterpillar. In the group Hymenoptera, related to bees.

Feeds on turf as well as crops like wheat.

Not common in most years. Some have been reported this season to the MSU Diagnostic Clinic.



ID: color brown or green. More than 5 PAIRS of PROLEGS (it looks 'leggy')

### Wheathead Armyworm

Uncommon; I've never seen one, but Michigan is in its range. This caterpillar likes to feed on the head itself and eats kernels. Probably does more kernel feeding than clipping.



ID: Light broad stripe down side. Body tapers towards rear. NO dark bars.