



Clover root weevil well established

By Karen Goodger

The clover root weevil discovered on a Richmond dairy farm is well established on other farms in the region, a pastoral specialist says.

FarmWise consultant Brent Boyce said some visiting colleagues from Taranaki and the Waikato surprised him by identifying the weevil on a Rai Valley farm last month and he has since found it on his own Dovedale farm.

"I can see it out there now - they're just munching through the clover."

AgResearch is planning a South Island response to manage the destructive pest after finding it thriving on a Richmond dairy farm. Scientists believe the weevil could be well established in localised populations throughout the South Island even though none were found during subsequent checks of properties between Nelson and Christchurch.

Mr Boyce said he didn't panic upon finding the weevil because his North Island colleagues who had lived with it for several years advised there was little that could be done about it.

"I'd never seen it before. I thought they were joking at first."

The weevil devoured all the clover as it built to a climax adult population and then the problem began subsiding, he said.

"It's definitely here and it's been here more than a week. It could be this year those numbers reach those critical levels."

But Mr Boyce was supportive of any biocontrols that could assist.

"If it's going to do the job, bring it on."

A tiny parasitic wasp, *Microctonus aethiopoides*, was used by AgResearch earlier this year in Morrinsville, Hawke's Bay, Bulls and Feilding to fight the weevil.

AgResearch hopes to initiate managed biocontrol releases in the South Island this winter after conducting more intensive surveys. It has warned that the extent and timeliness of the response will depend on funding.

Senior scientist Craig Phillips said

the wasp was totally harmless to humans and killed the weevil by injecting

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it with an egg which makes the female weevil sterile.

Appleby dairy farmer Murray King said the weevil's discovery in Richmond was "highly alarming", even though farmers had suspected that it would eventually show up in the South Island.

"Essentially farms will need to use more nitrogen fertiliser and that's got downstream environmental impacts."

Visiting North Island farmers were often amazed by the amount of clover in the pasture here, Mr King said.

"We could lose our competitive advantage."

"It will definitely impact on the bottom line. The degree of that impact is unknown."

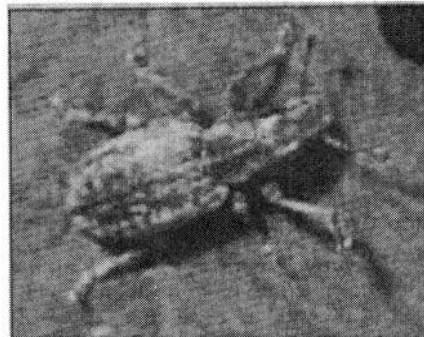
Richmond dairy farmer Ken Polglase said he did not know exactly where the weevil had been found, but was also concerned by the news.

"It's just another thing we have to learn to come to grips with and deal with and it's just another cost. It's probably something we'll learn to cope with on our own."

He disputed there was any environmental impact from adding fertiliser, saying it was simply replacing the nitrogen levels that would have been generated by the clover.

Nelson Federated Farmers president Edwin Newport said the weevil affected all pastoral farming.

"I guess the concern is how widespread it would be. Once it comes we sort of have to live with it."



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PEST: Clover root weevil