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# Biological Activity of *Beauveria bassiana* Against *Elasmopalpus lignosellus* (Lepidoptera: Pyralidae) on Leaf Substrates and Soil

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**ABSTRACT** *Beauveria bassiana* (Balsamo) Vuillimen has been identified as a naturally occurring pathogen of larval lesser cornstalk borer, *Elasmopalpus lignosellus* (Zeller). Studies were conducted to determine the effects of a commercial *B. bassiana* spore preparation (ABG-6178, Abbott Laboratories) on larvae of *E. lignosellus*. *B. bassiana* was virulent to first and third instars in bioassays in which inoculum was applied to leaf substrates. First instars were more susceptible than third instars. Larvae treated with *B. bassiana* continued to develop and consume food at normal rates until they died or pupated. Higher conidial levels were required to cause mortality when inoculum was mixed into the larval soil habitat. Sterilizing soil before bioassaying resulted in a 10- and 1,000-fold reduction in LC<sub>50</sub> values required to kill first and third instars, respectively.

**KEY WORDS** Insecta, insect pathogens, biological control, *Elasmopalpus lignosellus*

LESSER CORNSTALK BORER, *Elasmopalpus lignosellus* (Zeller), is a pest of many important agricultural crops. An alternative to chemical control for *E. lignosellus* is biological control; surveys of parasites and pathogens have revealed an array of potential biotic control agents (Chalfant et al. 1982). However, no research has been done to increase the effectiveness of these natural control agents. Pathogens identified from larvae of *E. lignosellus* include a granulosis virus; an entomopoxvirus; a microsporidium; a *Bacillus* sp.; and several fungi, including *Beauveria bassiana* (Balsamo) Vuillimen, *Aspergillus* spp., and *Fusarium* sp. (Johnson 1978, Funderburk et al. 1984). The entomopoxvirus, the granulosis virus, and the microsporidium are obligate intracellular pathogens and must be produced within larvae. In contrast, the fungal pathogen *B. bassiana* may be readily mass produced on various mycological media. This fungus, already in wide-scale use in eastern Europe, USSR, and China, is currently being researched in the United States for its potential against various soil-dwelling and stem-boring insect pests (Gottwald & Tedders 1983, Feng et al. 1985, McCoy et al. 1985).

Preliminary bioassays in our laboratory demonstrated that first instars of *E. lignosellus* were susceptible to a commercial *B. bassiana* spore preparation (ABG-6178; Abbott Laboratories, North

Chicago, Ill.). The objective of our study was to determine the effects of this *B. bassiana* strain on the consumption, development, and mortality of first and third instars of *E. lignosellus*. Additional assays also were performed to evaluate the effect of *B. bassiana*-treated soil on the survival of larvae

## Materials and Methods

*Elasmopalpus lignosellus* were reared on an artificial diet (Chalfant 1975) in 30-ml plastic rearing cups at 27 ± 2°C with a 14:10 (L:D) photoperiod and 60 ± 5% RH. Larvae used in the experiments were first and third instars. Third instars used in the bioassays were transferred as neonates to excised soybean leaflets and allowed to feed until reaching the third instar.

A wettable-powder spore preparation of *B. bassiana* (batch #16297-147, Abbott Laboratories) was suspended and diluted in sterile distilled water to obtain the following range of concentrations: 0, 10, 50, 100, 500, and 1,000 colony-forming units (CFU)/cm<sup>2</sup> leaf surface. A 40- $\mu$ l droplet of each concentration was spread across the underneath surface of a soybean leaf disk (1.7 cm diameter) and allowed to air dry. One first or third instar was placed in each 30-ml plastic rearing cup containing one treated leaf disk and allowed to feed on the treated leaf disk for 5 d. Cups were placed in plastic crispers and maintained in an incubator at 27 ± 2°C and photoperiod of 14:10 (L:D). The experiment consisted of six treatments with three replications per treatment and 20 larvae per replication. Mortality was monitored 2, 5, 7, 9, 12, 14, 16, 19, and 21 d following treatment. Untreated control

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Table 1. Estimates of  $LC_{10}$ ,  $LC_{50}$ , and  $LC_{90}$  (CFU/cm<sup>2</sup> leaf surface) for *B. bassiana* 12 d after treatment against first and third instars of *E. lignosellus*

Instar	LC ( $\pm 95\%$ CL)	Slope
First	$LC_{10} = 8.70 \times 10^{-1}$ ( $2.22 \times 10^0 - 1.78 \times 10^1$ )	1.12
	$LC_{50} = 1.21 \times 10^1$ ( $1.93 \times 10^1 - 6.05 \times 10^0$ )	
	$LC_{90} = 1.68 \times 10^2$ ( $3.18 \times 10^2 - 1.08 \times 10^2$ )	
Third	$LC_{10} = 1.38 \times 10^{-1}$ ( $1.1 \times 10^0 - 1.06 \times 10^{-3}$ )	0.50
	$LC_{50} = 5.07 \times 10^1$ ( $1.82 \times 10^2 - 1.85 \times 10^1$ )	
	$LC_{90} = 1.87 \times 10^4$ ( $8.03 \times 10^3 - 3.73 \times 10^3$ )	

mortality data were corrected using an Abbott's (1925) formula before probit analysis was done, and estimates of  $LC_{10}$ ,  $LC_{50}$ ,  $LC_{90}$ , and  $LT_{50}$  and the confidence limits (CL) of each estimate were determined by probit analyses using SAS (SAS Institute 1982).

The relative consumption and development of *B. bassiana*-infected larvae were compared with those of untreated larvae. Leaf disks, removed from bioassay containers, were cleaned of debris and oven dried. Fresh leaf disks were supplied at 5, 7, 12, 14, 16, and 19 d after exposure. Consumption was measured by subtracting the weight of remaining dried leaf disks from an average of 20 whole leaf disks. Weight of surviving larvae was recorded at 9, 14, and 21 d for larvae exposed as first instar and at 7 and 14 d for larvae exposed as third instar. The stage of development of treated and untreated larvae was recorded at 7, 14, and 21 d after treatment for first instars and at 7 and 14 d for third instars. Days to pupation and pupal weight also were determined. These data were subjected to analysis of variance for a randomized complete block design (Cochran & Cox 1957) with significantly different means ( $P < 0.05$ ) separated by Duncan's (1955) multiple-range test.

The persistence of *B. bassiana* in soil (Grossarenic Paleudult, loamy siliceous, thermic) collected in Quincy, Fla., was investigated using the same spore preparation of *B. bassiana* as described previously. The range of concentrations in this experiment was 1,000–500,000 CFU/cm<sup>3</sup> of field soil. The experiment for first instars consisted of five fungal treatments and two soil treatments (autoclaved and unautoclaved soil), with six replications per soil treatment and 10 larvae per replication. The experiment involving third instars consisted of six fungal treatments and two soil treatments, with four replications per fungal-soil treatment and 10 larvae per replication. The autoclaved soil used in the experiments was autoclaved twice. The sorghum seedlings used in these assays were germinated in 14-cm Petri dishes lined with filter paper and kept moist with a 0.25% benomyl solution to prevent fungal growth. A 1-cm<sup>3</sup> sample of autoclaved or unautoclaved soil was placed in a 30-ml plastic rearing cup, and a 40- $\mu$ l droplet of the appropriate spore concentration was mixed gently into the soil and allowed to dry. One 5-d-old sor-

Table 2. Calculated  $LT_{50}$  values (days) for first and third instars of *E. lignosellus* treated with various concentrations (CFU/cm<sup>2</sup> leaf surface) of *B. bassiana*

CFU/cm <sup>2</sup>	$LT_{50}$ ( $\pm 95\%$ CL)	
	First instar	Third instar
10	14.3 (17.3–12.2)	19.6 (31.5–15.7)
50	8.5 (9.7–7.2)	12.4 (15.7–10.6)
100	6.6 (7.9–4.9)	12.6 (14.5–11.4)
500	5.7 (6.3–5.0)	10.2 (12.0–8.7)
1,000	4.4 (5.1–3.5)	6.3 (8.1–3.3)

ghum seedling and one first instar were placed in each cup containing soil treatments. Cups were placed in crispers and maintained in an incubator at  $27 \pm 2^\circ\text{C}$  and photoperiod of 14:10. For the third instar, a second sorghum seedling was added to each cup 4 d later. Mortality of first and third instars was recorded 8 d after exposure, and dose-response data were analyzed as previously described.

## Results and Discussion

Differences in susceptibility to *B. bassiana* applied on leaf substrates between first and third instars of *E. lignosellus* are evident in the analyses of the dose-response data at 12 d after treatment (Table 1). The estimated  $LC_{50}$  and  $LC_{90}$  values for first and third instars represented a 4- and 111-fold difference in susceptibility, respectively. As *B. bassiana* concentrations increased, calculated  $LT_{50}$  values decreased for first and third instars (Table 2). At dosages of 50 CFU/cm<sup>2</sup> leaf surface or higher, time to 50% mortality of first instars ranged between about 4 and 5 d, whereas 50% mortality of third instars occurred between about 6 and 12 d after treatment.

Weight and development times of untreated and surviving *B. bassiana*-treated *E. lignosellus* larvae were statistically similar (Table 3). Most larvae exposed as first instars to rates of  $10^2$  conidia/cm<sup>2</sup> or greater died before successfully pupating. Larvae exposed as first instars to rates of 50 conidia/cm<sup>2</sup> or less were fifth or sixth instars 14 d after exposure, with mean days to pupation at these rates ranging between 16.1 and 17.5. Mean days to pupation for larvae exposed as third instars and surviving to pupation ranged between 8.8 and 10.7 at all dosage rates.

Mean cumulative leaf consumption of untreated and *B. bassiana*-treated larvae was statistically similar (Table 4). As with estimates for weight and development, reliable estimates of cumulative leaf consumption 14 d after exposure were not obtained for larvae exposed as first instars to rates of  $10^2$  conidia/cm<sup>2</sup> or greater because of high mortality. Leaf consumption increased greatly with development until larvae neared pupation. Cumulative consumption of untreated larvae over development from first instar to pupation was described by the regression equation  $Y = -0.00203X + 0.000393X^2$



**Table 4.** Effects of *B. bassiana* on cumulative leaf consumption by larvae of *E. lignosellus* exposed as first or third instar

Instar	CFU/cm <sup>2</sup>	Mean leaf dry wt consumption, mg ( $\pm$ SEM) <sup>a</sup>					
		n	Day 5	n	Day 9	n	Day 14
First	0	54	1.6 (0.2)	45	11.3 (0.7)	32	41.2 (2.3)
	10	55	1.5 (0.3)	38	11.5 (1.1)	29	41.7 (7.8)
	50	53	1.2 (0.2)	23	9.2 (1.3)	9	32.2 (6.7)
	100	44	0.4 (0.1)	11	11.3 (1.6)		ND
	500	38	1.6 (0.2)	9	8.6 (1.6)		ND
	1,000	28	1.2 (0.4)	5	5.6 (1.3)		ND
Third	0	52	31.1 (1.9)	44	53.0 (2.9)	41	55.7 (2.6)
	10	56	28.4 (1.7)	42	52.8 (3.0)	38	56.6 (2.9)
	50	49	28.6 (2.6)	33	44.6 (4.2)	28	50.5 (4.1)
	100	55	31.1 (2.0)	32	33.9 (4.2)	28	29.6 (4.2)
	500	48	29.6 (2.6)	28	37.8 (4.9)	24	39.3 (5.3)
	1,000	43	27.7 (7.0)	15	40.8 (5.8)	11	39.6 (6.3)

Means within columns are not significantly different ( $P < 0.05$ ; Duncan's (1955) multiple range test).

<sup>a</sup> ND, not determined because nearly all larvae died before 14 d.

oculum levels higher than the original CFU level added to soil substrates.

*Beauveria bassiana* shows promise as a biological control agent against larvae of *E. lignosellus*. The fungus was highly virulent to first and third instars when inoculum was applied to leaf surfaces, but first instars were more susceptible than third instars. Larvae treated with *B. bassiana* continued to develop and consume food at normal rates until death or pupation occurred. Higher levels were required to cause mortality when inoculum was mixed with soil. Consequently, better results may be obtained in field efficacy experiments by applying inoculum of *B. bassiana* directly to crop structures used as food rather than to the larval soil habitat.

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**Table 5.** Estimates of LC<sub>10</sub>, LC<sub>50</sub>, and LC<sub>90</sub> (CFU/cm<sup>3</sup> soil) for *B. bassiana* 8 d after treatment against first and third instars of *E. lignosellus*

Instar	Soil	LC (95% CL)	Slope	
First	Unautoclaved	LC <sub>10</sub> = 4.43 × 10 <sup>4</sup> (1.79 × 10 <sup>4</sup> -2.40 × 10 <sup>4</sup> )	0.79	
		LC <sub>50</sub> = 1.88 × 10 <sup>4</sup> (3.24 × 10 <sup>4</sup> -7.66 × 10 <sup>3</sup> )		
		LC <sub>90</sub> = 7.97 × 10 <sup>5</sup> (4.17 × 10 <sup>5</sup> -3.48 × 10 <sup>5</sup> )		
	Autoclaved	LC <sub>10</sub> = 2.91 × 10 <sup>4</sup>	0.65	
		LC <sub>50</sub> = 2.55 × 10 <sup>4</sup>		
		LC <sub>90</sub> = 2.32 × 10 <sup>5</sup>		
Third	Unautoclaved	LC <sub>10</sub> = 1.94 × 10 <sup>3</sup> (2.12 × 10 <sup>3</sup> -3.42 × 10 <sup>2</sup> )	1.20	
		LC <sub>50</sub> = 1.23 × 10 <sup>4</sup> (1.90 × 10 <sup>4</sup> -7.37 × 10 <sup>3</sup> )		
		LC <sub>90</sub> = 1.45 × 10 <sup>5</sup> (3.27 × 10 <sup>5</sup> -8.26 × 10 <sup>4</sup> )		
		Autoclaved	LC <sub>10</sub> = 4.05 × 10 <sup>2</sup>	0.49
			LC <sub>50</sub> = 1.73 × 10 <sup>4</sup>	
			LC <sub>90</sub> = 7.38 × 10 <sup>4</sup>	

## lus exposed as first or third

n	Day 14
32	41.2 (2.3)
29	41.7 (7.9)
9	32.2 (6.7)
	ND
	ND
	ND
41	55.7 (2.6)
38	56.6 (2.9)
28	50.5 (4.1)
28	29.6 (4.2)
24	39.3 (5.3)
11	39.6 (6.3)

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## r treatment against first and

	Slope
10 <sup>1</sup> )	0.79
10 <sup>1</sup> )	
10 <sup>2</sup> )	
	0.65
10 <sup>2</sup> )	
10 <sup>3</sup> )	1.20
10 <sup>3</sup> )	
10 <sup>4</sup> )	
	0.49