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## On-Farm New England Hemp Pest & Disease Scouting Report

Item Type	report;article
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Download date	2026-05-16 22:53:04
Link to Item	<a href="https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14849/6716">https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14849/6716</a>



## 2021 On-Farm New England Hemp Pest & Disease Scouting Report

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A survey of arthropod pests and disease was conducted on farms throughout the Northeast during the 2021 field season to qualify the species composition of disease and insect pests on industrial hemp. Hemp is a non-psychoactive variety of *cannabis sativa L.* The crop is one of historical importance in the U.S. and reemerging in worldwide importance as manufacturers seek hemp as a renewable and sustainable resource for a wide variety of consumer and industrial products. Today, industrial hemp is re-emerging as a locally grown product in the U.S. There is little information on insect pests and diseases of industrial hemp in the Northeast, and this survey was intended to help identify common pests that growers may encounter. Participation in the scouting program allowed growers to develop scouting schedules and become effective in disease and insect identification and management, leading to higher quality crops.

### Methods

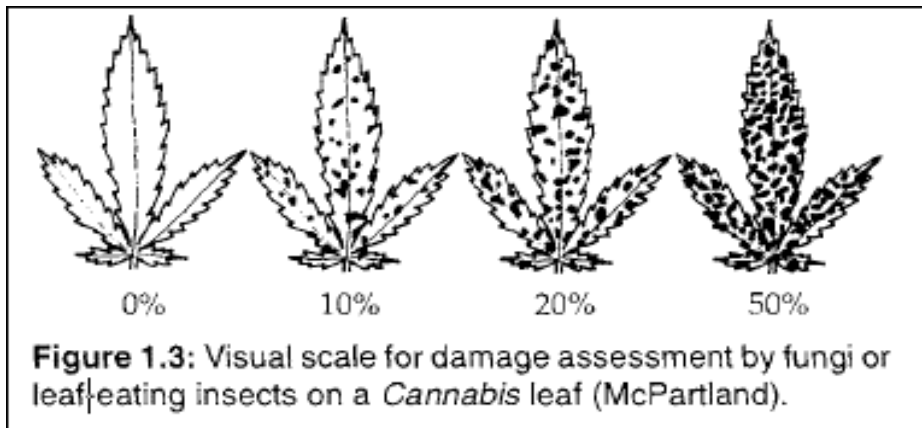
Eleven industrial hemp farms in Vermont, three farms in Maine, two farms in Connecticut, and two farms in New York were scouted. Vermont locations included the towns of Alburgh, Cornwall, Addison, Hardwick, Stowe, Morrisville, Hyde Park, Wolcott, and Putney. Maine locations included Union, Old Town, and Machias, Connecticut locations included Vernon and Scotland, and New York locations included Trumansburg and Berkshire (Figure 1). Unknown disease and insect samples were taken and identified with assistance from the University of Vermont Plant Diagnostic Laboratory (Burlington, Vermont).



**Figure 1. Locations of farm scouting sites, 2021. (Esri, WGS 84 Basemap).**

Since the type of diseases and pests change over the course of the season, farms were scouted at two critical periods during the growing season; at flower development stage (mid-August) and just before harvest (mid-September). Three adjacent plants were scouted at five locations within each field in a W-shaped pattern to ensure all quadrants of the field were assessed. Five leaves were randomly selected including top, mid and lower sections of the plants, as well as the terminal and 4 axillary cola buds (pre-harvest),

and evaluated for incidence (number of leaves affected) and severity (% total leaf damage; see Figure 2) for each of the diseases and insect pests listed in the scouting form. Incidence results refer to the leaves scouted, except for botrytis, which includes the cola buds. Stems, crown, and root issues were also noted if present, and the presence of other diseases, pests, or disorders were noted.



**Figure 1.3: Visual scale for damage assessment by fungi or leaf-eating insects on a *Cannabis* leaf (McPartland).**

**Figure 2. Leaf assessment scale from Hemp Diseases and Pests, McPartland, 2000.**

### Common Diseases in Industrial Hemp

*Sclerotinia sclerotiorum*, or white mold, spreads by spores that are carried by wind and insects (Figure 3). Spores infect the stem and flower in hemp. The resting bodies of the fungus, sclerotia, can overwinter in the soil and remain viable for over 5 years. Moist conditions, high humidity, and warm temperatures encourage spore survival and growth. Seedlings may rot or become stunted, leading to poor establishment and lower yields. Alternative hosts include many broadleaf crops and weeds, so good weed control and proper rotations are key to its management.



*Botrytis cinerea*, or grey mold, is a necrotrophic fungus that can cause brown, damp lesions on the plant. Infected leaves and flowers become necrotic and produce grey spores, and stalks may break (Figure 4). When tissue decays, it produces black rounded pieces of sclerotia, which are overwintering vessels, that look like rodent scat. *Botrytis* can cause damping off early in the season especially in wet years.

**Leaf Spots** can include several species of pathogens, and one specific to hemp is *Septoria cannabidis*. Like most foliar diseases, it requires moist condition to germinate, and begins at the ground in the bottom leaves, working its way up the plant. Common signs are yellow spots, and discoloration (browning and yellowing).

**Powdery mildew** appears as patches of white spores on the surface of leaves (Figure 5). If the infection progresses, and entire leaves, petioles, and flowers become covered, that can lead to reduced flower quality. Even though powdery mildew can be found in hops, a close relative of hemp, it is not known if the same race of the pathogen attacks both plant hosts.

### Common Insect and Mite Pests in Industrial Hemp

*Cannabis aphids* winged and wingless forms are found on leaves and stems, change color later in season (cream/light green to pale pink to light brown), and feed on fluid in phloem (often little to no leaf symptoms) (Figure 6). Populations slowly grow as the season progresses, high populations cause reduce plant vigor, slow growth, wilting and leaf yellowing.

*Two spotted spider mites* are very small straw color to green mites (adults have a pair of large, dark spots on each side of body) often found on leaf undersides along with cast skins and eggs (Figure 7). Leaf stippling is a common symptom seen on leaves, as well as extensive webbing when infestation is severe. Populations can explode during hot and dry conditions, or after pesticide applications.

**Figure 3. Sclerotinia (white mold)**



**Figure 4. Botrytis (grey mold)**



**Figure 5. Powdery mildew**



**Figures 6 & 7. Cannabis aphid (left) and two spotted spider mites (right)**

*European cornborer* do not prefer hemp, but if a preferred host is not available (Figure 8). The peak 1<sup>st</sup> flight late June to early July in VT will result in damage to stalks and stems causing them to break. In most of our region, enough degree-accumulation occurs for a 2<sup>nd</sup> flight in August that can lead to damaged buds.



Figure 8. European corn borer

*Flea beetles* are tiny black beetles (different species may be present) whose larvae feed on plant roots, though the larval damage is not significant. The adults, however, cause small “shot hole” wounds on leaves. There are two adult generations, in June/early July and late August/September, but generally only the large populations when plants are young affect plant growth because feeding can damage growing points.

*Potato leafhoppers* adults are small wedge-shaped insects blown in on weather currents early in June (Figure 9). The winged adults will readily jump and fly when disturbed, however the wingless nymphs will simply scuttle around on the underside of the leaves. They can have several generations that build throughout the season, leading to the characteristic “hopperburn” damage, as sign of cell death, and reduced photosynthesis.



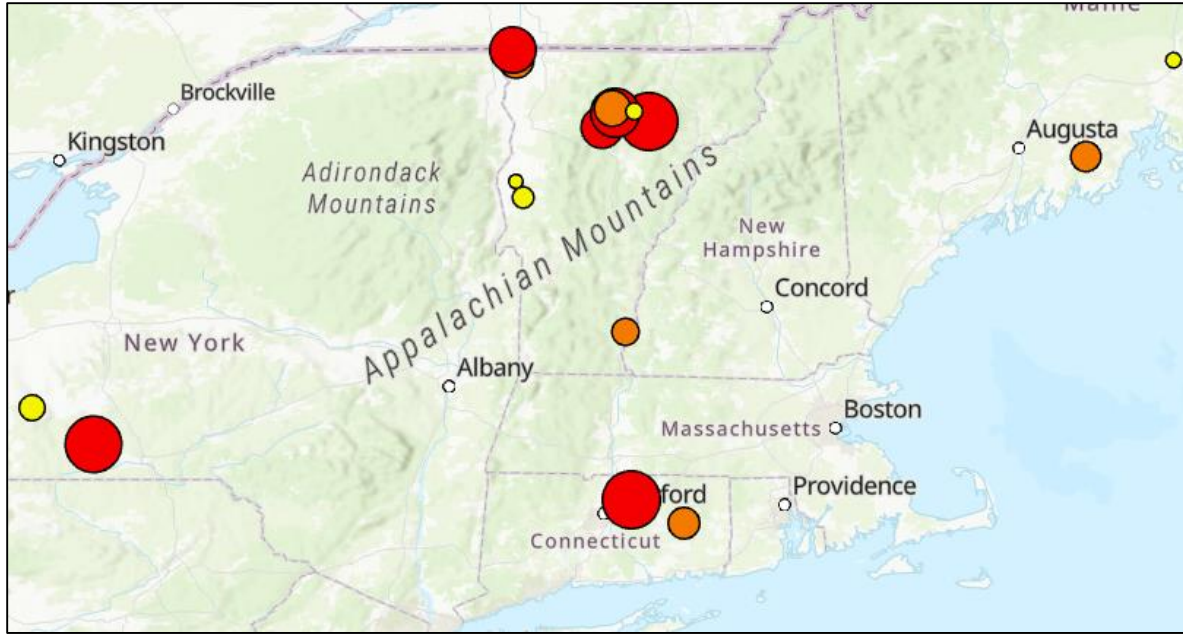
Figure 9. Potato leafhoppers on hops

**Diseases Identified On-Farm**

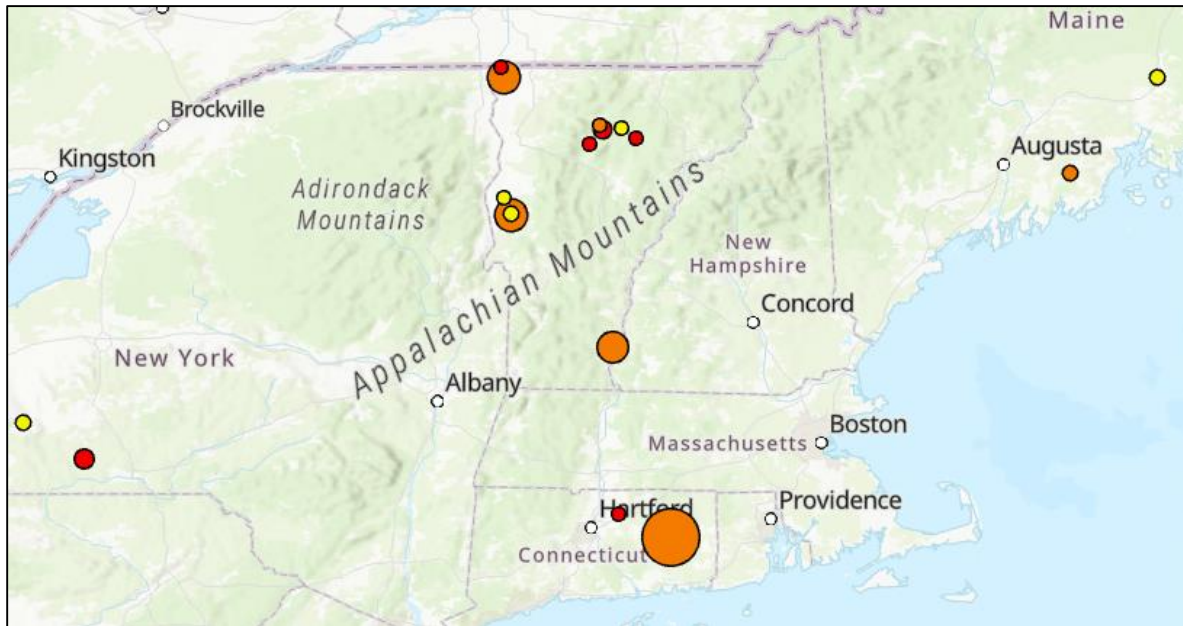
The warm and dry growing conditions throughout much of the season resulted in relatively low levels of foliar and root disease. *Sclerotinia* white mold was observed in Maine and Vermont, and powdery mildew was observed in Connecticut and Vermont. Leaf spots were seen in every state and at every farm site except one farm in Addison, Vermont. Botrytis was also recorded in every state. The plant diseases identified during the 2021 growing season are listed by state in Table 1, and leaf spot and botrytis incidence are mapped in Figures 10 and 11. Data by scouting date and farm are shown in Tables 2 and 3.

**Table 1. Disease presence by state, 2021.**

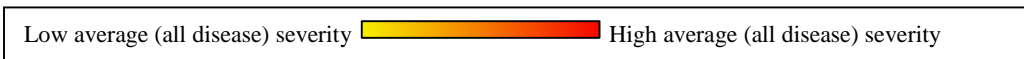
State	Leaf Spots	Powdery Mildew	Botrytis	Sclerotinia
Connecticut	X	X	X	
Maine	X		X	X
New York	X		X	
Vermont	X	X	X	X



**Figure 10. Leaf spot severity, 2021.** Average leaf spot severity is represented by the size of the dot, which marks the farm location. The average severity of all disease scouted is represented by the color of the marker. (Legend below Figure 11).



**Figure 11. Botrytis severity, 2021.** Average botrytis severity is represented by the size of the dot, which marks the farm location. The average severity of all disease scouted is represented by the color of the marker.



**Table 2. The average severity of diseases on hemp at flowering and pre-harvest in Connecticut, Maine, and New York, 2021. Severity is for 5 leaves per plant on 15 plants per field.**

		Flowering				Pre-harvest			
State	Town	Leaf spots	Powdery Mildew	Botrytis	Sclerotinia	Leaf spots	Powdery Mildew	Botrytis	Sclerotinia
		Sev (%)	Sev (%)	Sev (%)	Sev (%)	Sev (%)	Sev (%)	Sev (%)	Sev (%)
Connecticut	Vernon	7.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	21.7	2.03	0.0	0.0
	Scotland	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	11.0	0.0	8.87	0.0
Maine	Machias	2.61	0.0	0.0	0.01	0.01	0.0	0.0	0.0
	Union	3.72	0.0	0.0	0.0	7.21	0.0	0.04	0.03
	Old Town	0.19	0.0	0.04	0.0	0.17	0.0	0.04	0.0
New York	Trumansburg	1.06	0.0	0.0	0.0	6.61	0.0	0.07	0.0
	Berkshire	11.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	18.0	0.0	1.07	0.0

**Table 3. The average severity of diseases on hemp at flowering and pre-harvest in Vermont, 2021. Severity is for 5 leaves per plant on 15 plants per field.**

		Flowering				Pre-harvest			
Town	Leaf spots	Powdery Mildew	Botrytis	Sclerotinia	Leaf spots	Powdery Mildew	Botrytis	Sclerotinia	
		Sev (%)	Sev (%)	Sev (%)	Sev (%)	Sev (%)	Sev (%)	Sev (%)	
Alburgh-Borderview	0.467	0.0	0.0	0.0	21.5	3.07	0.0	2.40	
Cornwall	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.87	0.0	0.067	0.0	
Cornwall Site 2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.07	7.33	3.60	0.0	
Alburgh Site 2	4.07	0.0	0.0	0.0	10.13	0.0	3.60	1.60	
Addison	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	
Hardwick	6.27	0.0	0.0	0.0	23.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	
Stowe	19.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	18.1	0.0	0.267	
Morrisville	19.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.67	0.0	0.88	0.0	
Hyde Park	8.53	0.0	0.0	0.0	6.40	1.73	0.0	0.267	
Wolcott	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.20	0.0	0.0	0.0	
Putney	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	8.50	0.0	3.58	0.0	

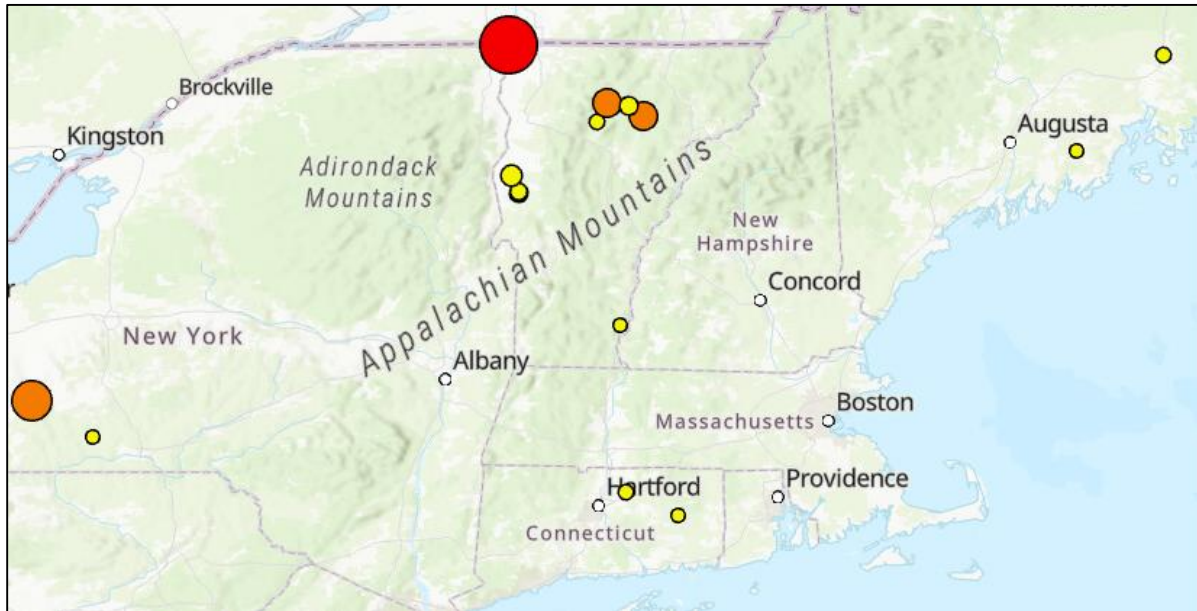
### Arthropod Pests Identified On-Farm

Spider mites and thrips were the least common pests seen on the hemp leaves. Spider mites were scouted at only one location in New York, and thrips were scouted at one farm in New York and one in Vermont.

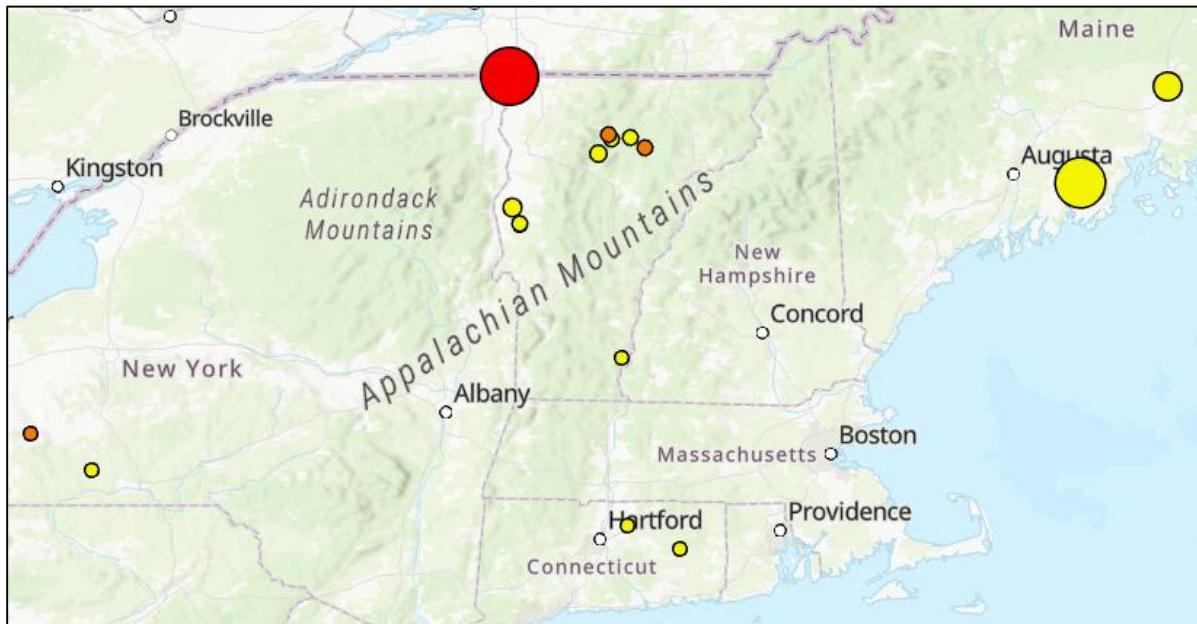
European cornborers (ECB) were only scouted in Connecticut and Vermont, and flea beetles were only seen in Vermont. Aphids were the primary insect pests and were identified in every state (Table 4), followed by leaf hoppers in Maine and Vermont. Scouting data by date, location, and species are shown in Tables 5 and 6, and aphid and leaf hopper incidences are mapped in Figures 12 and 13.

**Table 4. Arthropod presence by state, 2021.**

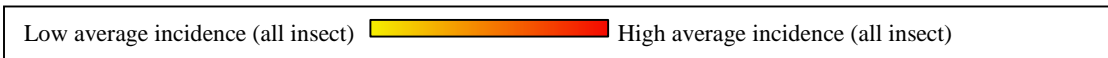
State	Aphids	ECB	Flea Beetles	Potato Leafhoppers	Spider Mites	Thrips
Connecticut	X	X				
Maine	X			X		
New York	X				X	X
Vermont	X	X	X	X		X



**Figure 12. Aphid incidence, 2021.** Average aphid incidence is represented by the size of the dot, which marks the farm location. The average incidence of all insects scouted is represented by the color of the marker.



**Figure 13. Potato leafhopper incidence, 2021.** Average leaf hopper incidence is represented by the size of the dot, which marks the farm location. The average incidence of all insects scouted is represented by the color of the marker.



**Table 5. Average number of arthropods per leaf, Connecticut, Maine, and New York, 2021. Incidence is for 5 leaves per plant on 15 plants per field.**

State	Town	Flowering						Pre-harvest					
		Aphid	ECB	Spider Mite	Flea Beetle	Potato Leaf-hopper	Thrips	Aphid	ECB	Spider Mite	Flea Beetle	Potato Leaf-hopper	Thrips
		Inc	Inc	Inc	Inc	Inc	Inc	Inc	Inc	Inc	Inc	Inc	Inc
Connecticut	Vernon	0.0	0.03	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	Scotland	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Maine	Machias	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	Union	0.027	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.613	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.0
	Old Town	0.03	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.17	0.0	0.01	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.13	0.0
New York	Trumansburg	0.03	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.04	0.0	0.01	0.0	0.0	0.03
	Berkshire	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

**Table 6. Average number of arthropods per leaf during two scouting periods, Vermont, 2021. Incidence is for 5 leaves per plant on 15 plants per field.**

Town	Flowering						Pre-harvest					
	Aphids	ECB	Spider Mites	Flea Beetle	Potato Leafhopper	Thrips	Aphids	ECB	Spider Mites	Flea Beetle	Potato Leafhopper	Thrips
	Inc	Inc	Inc	Inc	Inc	Inc	Inc	Inc	Inc	Inc	Inc	Inc
Alburgh-Borderview	1.32	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.027	0.0	7.17	0.027	0.0	0.0	0.947	0.0
Alburgh 2	0.027	0.04	0.0	0.107	0.0	0.0	0.413	0.04	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Cornwall 1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0267	0.013	0.08	0.36	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Cornwall 2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.707	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Addison	0.413	0.013	0.0	0.027	0.093	0.0	0.84	0.027	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Hardwick	2.65	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.107	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.013	0.0
Stowe	0.08	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.053	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Morrisville	0.04	0.0	0.0	0.04	0.027	0.0	0.133	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Hyde Park	1.04	0.0	0.0	0.013	0.0	0.0	1.63	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.013	0.0
Wolcott	0.507	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.013	0.0	0.173	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.013	0.0
Putney	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

### IPM (Integrated Pest Management)

A good IPM program starts with proper scouting and identification aligned with integrated approach to management to keep pest populations from causing significant yield and quality loss.

Regular scouting of hemp is a way to monitor pest populations and potential problems that may arise. Generally, scouting the underside of three leaves/plant in each variety is recommended weekly. Releasing non-invasive beneficial insects/natural enemies like ladybugs can be done to control pests. Trichogramma wasps, which can help control European corn borer populations, can be purchased as cards or eggs at an insectary or online, such as at [arbico-organics.com](http://arbico-organics.com) and [groworganic.com](http://groworganic.com). Trichogramma wasps are parasitoids that lay their eggs inside European corn borer eggs, preventing them from hatching. They can be released when the moths are beginning to lay eggs, within a week of the start of the moth flight. Naturally occurring predators can also be promoted by planting adjacent flowering plants.

There are several cultural practices that can help to manage diseases including growing varieties with known tolerance or resistance to disease, proper crop rotation, adequate crop spacing to maximize airflow, and proper nutrient management. We also highly recommend buying “certified” seed when possible. Certified seed guarantees that the seed meets or exceeds a strict set of quality control standards. Weed management is especially important to improve airflow and assist with keeping the canopy as dry as possible. Weeds can also harbor diseases that may also impact the hemp crop. Trimming the lower branches of large hemp plants can also help with airflow and slow the spread of disease. Spores from many of the fungal diseases can survive in the soil for 3 to 5 years waiting for their host plant and/or ideal conditions. Crop rotation away from host crops and healthy soil are critical to minimizing diseases.

If you determine that a chemical control is necessary, currently there are few EPA-registered pesticide products labeled for use on hemp. Read and follow pesticide labels carefully. Be very aware that broad-spectrum insecticides kill natural predators and often lead to secondary outbreaks of other pests.

The most recent information about EPA approved pesticides for hemp can be found at:  
<https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/pesticide-products-registered-use-hemp>

Policies from the Vermont Hemp Rules, including pesticide policies for the state, can be found at:  
<https://agriculture.vermont.gov/public-health-agricultural-resource-management-division/hemp-program/hemp-resources-and-guidance>

## References

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## Acknowledgements

Thank you to the inter-state scouting team: Ann Hazelrigg, John Bruce, and Scott Lewins in Vermont, and Marion Zuefle in New York, Shuresh Ghimire in Connecticut, and John Jemison in Maine. The UVM Extension Northwest Crops and Soils Program would like to give a special thanks to Roger Rainville and the staff at Borderview Research Farm for their generous help with the trials. We would like to acknowledge Catherine Davidson, Hillary Emick, Lindsey Ruhl, Sophia Wilcox Warren, and Sara Ziegler for their assistance with data collection and entry. This work was funded by the USDA Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program, Research and Education Grant ONE 19-333. This information is presented with the understanding that no product discrimination is intended and neither endorsement of any product mentioned, nor criticism of unnamed products, is implied.

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