

Two major crop scourges are hybridising to produce a new mega-pest

By [Rich Haridy](#)

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Australian scientists have found evidence that two of the world's most damaging pests have hybridised to create a dangerous mega-pest with pesticide-resistant genes. The new hybrid has presently only been identified in Brazil but the researchers warn that its spread throughout the global agricultural community could be devastating.



The cotton bollworm is hybridizing with the corn earworm in ways that could result in a damaging mega-pest (Credit: CSIRO)

Helicoverpa armigera, commonly known as the cotton bollworm, and *Helicoverpa zea*, the corn earworm, are two types of very hungry caterpillar that cause billions of dollars of damage to crops every year. Corn, cotton, tomato and soybean are just some of the many crops these pests can attack, with the cotton bollworm having developed resistance to all pesticides targeted at it.

[In 2017, an eight-year project](#) that mapped the entire genome of both caterpillars was completed. The study was designed to help researchers identify specific genes that cause the pests to become resistant to pesticides. A new paper has now been published showing evidence that the two moths are clearly hybridising in a variety of novel ways.

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[\[https://newatlas.com/author/rich-haridy/ Richard\]](https://newatlas.com/author/rich-haridy/) is based in Melbourne, Australia and has a strong interest in film, VR and new media. He has written for a number of online and print publications over the last decade and also acted as a film critic for several radio broadcasters and podcasts. Richard was Chair of the Australian Film Critics Association for two years (2013-2015) and when not writing or making videos for New Atlas he can be found in darkened cinemas yelling at the screen.

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