Wilson County Agricultural Article from Ruth Correll, Agricultural Extension Agent

Fall Armyworm in Pastures and Hayfields

This is the season for the fall armyworm. This is a chronic pest in the southeast annually. If you notice sudden brown spots in your pastures or hayfields with thin plants, this may be an indication that you have the fall armyworm present. They feed on a variety of crops including bermudagrass, alfalfa, pearl millet, sorghum sudan hybrids and tall fescue with bermudagrass and alfalfa being two of their favorites. They also feed on winter annuals such as ryegrass, rye and wheat. Even soybeans, corn and vegetable crops can serve as hosts.

The most usual time for activity begins in late July or early August. Seasonal highs usually occur August through September. These pests do not overwinter in our area. They are not tolerant of even the mildest of winters.

Where do they come from if they do not overwinter here? The source is the fall armyworm moth which is carried by air currents from the most southern parts of the US as well as Central and South America. They arrive, lay their eggs and within 3-5 days the young worms begin to hatch. There are usually three or more surges as the life cycle is repeated. Drought conditions are very favorable to their infestation and survival.

The fall armyworm is part of the same insect family as cutworms but cutworms are night feeders and fall armyworms are day feeders and typically most active in early morning and late afternoon. If present in tall grasses they can be active throughout the day. They often seem to appear in large numbers “overnight” when brown patches in a hayfield or pasture are noticed. The brown patch begins to increase in size and when examined the plant stems are the only part standing. The oldest worms do the most damage and young worms often go undetected. The fall armyworm can seem to disappear as suddenly as it appeared. They older worms may burrow into the ground to pupate or they move on in search of food. The knowledge of this behavior pattern will assist with scouting for the presence of this pest as looking in the early morning or late afternoon is the best time.

Healthy, well established grass pastures can survive severe infestations but seedling and fall seeded plants are at a greater risk. The young plants can be stunted and killed if feeding is too severe.

Management options may include insecticides if the infestation is extremely severe. Mowing a hayfield may serve as a control option. If the decision is made to use an insecticide, make sure to read and follow the label. Most insecticides have grazing and hay harvesting restrictions.

If a hayfield is damaged, fertilize as recommended. If a pasture is damaged, restrict grazing until the grass has regrown. For additional information, contact your local Extension Office.
Agricultural Market Summary

Cattle Market Trends
This week was the first indication of calf prices moderating with steers down $1 to $3 and heifers down $3 to $4 per hundredweight. Market prices this fall for calves are expected to continue moderating. Feeder steers $1 to $3 lower, $165.00-$342.50; Feeder heifers $3 to $4 lower, $155.00-$290.00; Slaughter cows $1 to $3 higher, $80.00-$110.00; Slaughter bulls steady to $3 higher, $120.00-$147.00.

Grain Market Trends
Soybeans and wheat were down; corn was up for the week. Corn – Cash prices, $3.77-$3.90. September futures closed at $3.65 a bushel, up 1 cent. Soybeans – Cash prices, $8.65-$9.70. September futures closed at $9.07 a bushel, down 18 cents. Wheat – Cash prices, $4.50-$4.71. September futures closed at $4.98 a bushel, down 8 cents.

For additional information on these and other topics, contact the UT Extension Office, 925 East Baddour Parkway, Lebanon, TN 37087, 615-444-9584 or acorrell@utk.edu. UT Extension provides equal opportunities in all programs. Visit the UT/TSU Extension webpage at http://utextension.tennessee.edu/wilson or look for UT & TSU Extension, Wilson County on Facebook.

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