AgriLIFE EXTENSION
Texas A&M System

INSECTS AND WEEDS IN FOCUS

VOL 35 ISSUE 4 ENTO/SCS April 29. 2010

Inside this issue:

GULF COAST COTTON MANAGEMENT WORKSHOP FIRST SQUARE TO BLOOM

The workshop will be at the Texas Agrilife Research and Extension Center, Wednesday, May 12. The program will be from 8:30 – 11:30 a.m. with registration at 8:00 am. The Center is located on Highway 44 between Corpus Christi and Robstown. This workshop will provide methods on ways to follow development of the cotton crop and how to use the data to improve management decisions. Some of the key information provided will be managing fertility, plant height, square retention, and determining boll distribution that impact on decisions dealing with plant growth regulator use and insect management. The Crop Weather Station Online Tools will be outlined for use by crop consultants, Extension personnel, cotton producers and others interested in following plant growth and development progress of cotton plants on a field basis.

GENERAL CROP CONDITIONS

The crop season is off to a much better start than in many previous years as soil moisture has been very good, and growing conditions along with plant stands have generally been excellent. Some problems were experienced in the Lower Coastal Bend with white grubs destroying sorghum stands where the seed was not treated with an insecticide. Rice stink bugs also needed to be controlled on many wheat fields. Chinch bugs have also been discovered. Other than for these insect pests, few problems have been encountered. It is time to anticipate what might be found in the near future. See the discussion below by crop.

SUNFLOWER MOTH THE MAJOR INSECT PEST

Almost every year sunflower moth larvae cause heavy damage to developing seed in sunflower heads. The female moth is highly attracted to plants just beginning to bloom. Nearly all of the eggs of this moth are laid within 4 to 7 days after buds begin to open (yellow ray petals first become visible). In order to be timely with insecticide it is best to treat earlier than later as far as the percentages of heads showing yellow. Generally when 15% of the heads show yellow and moths are laying eggs treatment should be immediate. In our region this treatment is almost always required and could be considered to be automatic. At 5 to 7 days later if blooming is still underway an additional treatment is often needed. Generally, the two treatments are all that is needed for adequate protection of yield.

Fig. 1. Sunflower moths *(photo by Scott Russell).*

Fig.2. Sunflower moths *(photo by Scott Russell).*

Area sunflower producers have found the labeled pyrethroid insecticides to be effective in controlling infestations of sunflower moth larvae. Consider using a rate on the higher side of the range for this insect.

The yellow stripped armyworm and possibly other foliage feeding caterpillars have been observed feeding on sunflowers over the last two weeks. I doubt they will cause enough leaf loss to warrant treatment.

Fig.3. Sunflower moth larva *(photo by Scott Russell).*

For a detailed description of insect pests, scouting procedures, and suggested insecticides on sunflower refer to Extension Publication E-579 dated 7/09 titled *Managing Insect Pests of Texas Sunflowers*. It is available at http://agrilifebookstore.org/. Click on "browse the shelves" and on "crops" and then find it by number. Pictures herein were taken from the publication.

BE ON LOOKOUT FOR INSECTS IN SORGHUM

It is somewhat surprising that few aphids (yellow sugarcane aphid, greenbug, corn leaf aphid) have been observed in sorghum this season at least in the Corpus Christi area. I would expect to see some development of corn leaf aphid in plant whorls which can generally be considered a good thing as they result in cause an increase in the number of beneficial arthropods such as lady beetles, syrphid flies, green lacewing, spiders, other predators, and parasitic wasps. We may start to see corn earworm in sorghum whorls, but hopefully the weather pattern has not favored fall armyworm.

As sorghum begins to head and bloom be ready for rice stink bug and corn earworm (headworm) as I expect to see both in fairly high numbers this season. The rice stink bug has been heavy in wheat and our corn earworm pheromone trap catches have been higher than at any time in the last decade. The potential appears to be there, but only time will tell if these insects occur in high numbers in sorghum.

COTTON INSECTS OF INTEREST AT THIS TIME

The cotton aphid increased to high numbers in fields without systemic insecticide treated seed or in-furrow treatment, but they did not remain at those numbers long enough to cause any impact on yield or earliness. The decline was about as fast as the increase; expect to see more of the same in aphid numbers as they increase and decline rapidly on the small cotton. Thrips have also increased with the at-plant insecticides providing excellent control. Thrips cause damage from emergence to the 4-5 true leaf stage. The greatest damage by far is from emergence through 2 true leaves. Seldom is any treatment needed for thrips after 5 true leaves. Foliar feeding caterpillars such as yellow stripped armyworm, beet armyworm, salt marsh caterpillar, and loopers should be in mind even though the weather sequence to date probably does not favor development of any of these except salt marsh caterpillar. Watch for the salt marsh caterpillar migrating from roadside weeds into edges of cotton fields

Begin to make plans to scout for cotton fleahopper as cotton begins to square as this insect is now our key damaging pest in the Coastal Bend. The treatment threshold has not changed as 15 per 100 plants is a good rule of thumb to determine treatment needs. We have shown this to be true time and time again in small plot and large plot tests. If you are entering the second week of squaring and fleahopper numbers have begun to increase above 10 per 100 plants but have not reached 15 per 100 plants it will not be advisable to wait a long time to treat as the second and third weeks of squaring are most critical in protecting against excessive fruit loss. Consequence of fruit loss in the first week of squaring is usually not as great as loss in the following few weeks.

MESQUITE DEFOLIATION

Mesquite trees to the west and south in areas are being defoliated by small metallic colored beetles. Their numbers are very high in certain areas and it is not uncommon to observe complete defoliation of trees. The beetles are in the leaf beetle family of the Genus *Metaparia* spp. Larvae feed in the soil followed by emergence of adults in the spring each year; these adults feed on leaves.

INTERESTING INSECTS

One of the most common house ant species might have been built for living in some of the smallest spaces in a forest, but the ants have found ways to take advantage of the comforts of city living. Grzegorz Buczkowski, a Purdue University research assistant professor of entomology, found that odorous house ant colonies become larger and more complex as they move from forest to city and act somewhat like an invasive species. The ants live about 50 to a colony with one queen in forest settings but explode into super colonies with more than 6 million workers and 50,000 queens in urban areas. (Article from e! Science News dated 3/30/2010.)

For more information contact:

Roy D. Parker
Extension Entomologist
rd-parker@tamu.edu

Dan D. Fromme
Extension Agronomist
d-fromme@tamu.edu

10345 Hwy 44
Corpus Christi, TX 78406
(361) 265-9203
Fax (361) 265-9434

We're on the Web!

Newsletter available at http://agfacts.tamu.edu/~rparker/

Pest Management information available at http://txaac.org/

TEXAS IPM
Partners with Nature