

The Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Newsletter for Row Crops in the Lower Rio Grande Valley

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<http://agfacts.tamu.edu/D12>

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The dry fall and winter have left the Lower Rio Grande Valley short of needed soil moisture for the upcoming growing season. With no rain in the forecast, dryland farmers are faced with some hard decisions, to plant or not plant. Several groups have sent letters to congress requesting an increase in prevented planting payment, allowing Valley growers to recoup money already spent on land preparations. Dryland farmers are not the only group affected by the dry conditions. Several producers of irrigated acres are having to irrigate to provide enough moisture for seed to germinate. This practice is not required on all irrigated acreage in most years.

Growers will likely plant more cotton this year because of the dry conditions and insurance issues. The following is an excerpt from a letter written by McCook farmers on Feb. 22, 2006, to Mike Johanns, Secretary of Agriculture, regarding the soil situation in the Valley: "This drought has brought on a much bigger problem. Our soil type is mostly sandy loam. With the severe drought we are facing, our land is on the verge of "blowing out" on a large scale. And yet, for the farmer to collect a full indemnity he must plant his crop. This will in turn make matters much worse. The soil erosion will be unstoppable until there is significant rain fall, and not just an inch or two."

From an insect pest management perspective, the dry and dusty conditions could set us up for a destructive pest situation. The goal of the IPM program is to monitor selected fields closely and take care of potentially damaging pest populations as soon as they arise. New insecticide chemistries (new since 1995) are available to aide growers with their pest management tactics. In 2005 beet armyworms were identified in fields throughout the valley. Most fields

fit the description of a high risk field, which includes the following: sandy and droughty soils; fields with skippy, open canopies: drought-stressed plants; prolonged hot, dry weather. The likelihood of a heavy outbreak increase as more of these factors occur in a given location. However, when beet armyworm populations are high, all fields are susceptible. The 2006 field and environmental conditions are similar to the 1995 crop season. In 1995, the average yield was 80 lbs lint per acre compared to the average yield in the LRGV of around 500 lbs of lint per acre. This year there is potential for beet armyworm problems since similar conditions persist..

Additionally, there is the possibility of late season rains causing seed that has been dormant all season to germinate causing a real issue in the Valley. Depending on the timing of rain, this could lead to a late season crop that would have little or no economic value and would have to be destroyed by the stalk destruction deadline of September 1st. Also, cotton that emerges a secondary crop planted after cotton will have to be destroyed by the grower or sprayed by the Texas Boll Weevil Eradication (BWE) Foundation to prevent a buildup in boll weevils.

This will be the second year of the BWE in the LRGV (first full season after diapause treatments). The terms of the Lower Rio Grande Valley BWE requires growers to pay the full assessment if they plant (\$14 per dryland acre; \$28 per irrigated acre), whether or not the cotton emerges. The BWE Foundation will have to install boll weevil traps around all planted cotton fields and monitor fields on a weekly basis, in anticipation of cotton emerging

following rainfall later in the season. The BWE program was budgeted for approximately 250,000 acres of cotton each year. If cotton acreage increases this could lead to increased costs. Therefore, preventative planting would alleviate the pest management issues mentioned above.

**Crop Insurance Planting Alternative  
Luis A. Ribera, Texas Cooperative Extension**

Due to the severe drought in across Texas, dryland row crop producers are facing a tough decision, to take prevented planting payments or plant and hope for the best. Larry Falconer, TCE economist at Corpus Christi and myself have just developed a Crop Insurance Planting Alternative Decision Support Aid to help farmers weight their planting alternatives. This tool could help producers

calculate their prevented planting and failed acres crop insurance payments, as well as to calculate their pre-planting and planting cost, and any rebate given by seed companies.

To download a copy of the Excel spreadsheet from the web please visit: <http://agfacts.tamu.edu/~lfalcone/newweb/software.htm> and click on the link "Crop Insurance Planting Alternative Analysis Spreadsheet." If you have any questions or problems with the file please contact me at (956)968-5581 or email me at [lribera@tamu.edu](mailto:lribera@tamu.edu).

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