

FOCUS on South Plains Agriculture

A newsletter from the Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Extension Center at Lubbock

Editor's Note

Sugarcane aphid numbers are increasing rapidly in many area sorghum fields (including forage sorghum) and Blayne Reed, Extension Agent IPM in Hale and Swisher counties has just summarized current conditions, action thresholds and options in his newsletter. We are grateful to Blayne for allowing us to reprint this information as a special edition of FOCUS on South Plains Agriculture.

The aphid is known to be in Swisher, Briscoe, Hale, Floyd, Lubbock and Crosby counties. The aphid seems to be moving from east to west this year and it is probable that it is in Castro, Lamb and Hockley counties; Kerry Siders is looking for them now. RPP

Sugarcane Aphid Threat (From Plains Pest Management, October 20th, 2014)

In early to mid-September we confirmed the presence of sugarcane aphid in Hale, Swisher, & Floyd counties. Over the next few weeks we watched and documented as the sugarcane aphid infested field after field of our program's late planted sorghum fields. This infestation was sub-economic and appeared to be isolated to small hot spots within fields. Very little increase in size of colonies was observed in infested fields yet the aphids continued infesting new fields from east to west across our counties. We remained confident that they would not be an economic problem for a multitude of reasons, one of which being our cooler temperatures, but were certainly keeping an eye on them. For this reason we remained active in scouting late planted sorghum fields for the sugarcane aphid and it is a very good thing that we did. This aphid could be growing into a major problem this season. Based upon this aphid's history farther south, they could grow into that problem in just a matter of days.

In the past two weeks I have seen some of our earliest sugarcane aphid infested fields in south-eastern Swisher County increase from initial small hot spots with 20 to 40 aphids on the lower green leaves to what is now 100% in-field plant infestation with 20 to 40 aphids per lower leaf level and complete plant coverage from bottom to flag leaf

coverage in those old hot spots. In those hot spots, we already have desiccated plants and minor lodging.

This increase does not look to be slowing, but rather growing exponentially. Of our program's late sorghum fields, we have 98% of our fields infested as of today. A number of these fields (I estimate 20 %) have aphids covering the underside of leaves on the bottom half of all the plants and the old hot spots are climbing higher. These fields, with this level of pressure, could be a very serious problem if left unattended while we wait for harvest dry down. Reports from south Texas indicate that from this level the sugarcane aphid can increase to cover the entire plant, head and panicles included, in a matter of days. This would certainly be an economic problem and is very likely to cause harvest problems similar to what occurred in the Lower Rio Grande Valley last year.

I URGE all producers and consultants to take a few minutes and give sorghum and sorghum like hay crops a good walk through looking for these aphids. This weekend I stopped by a field of dryland haygrazer that was green and nearing boot less than a week ago. Saturday it had the look of a field that had been 'frosted.' Upon close inspection sugarcane aphids had completely covered the plants causing desiccation and plant death. Lodging had already begun.

If your sorghum field is nearing the situation I described earlier and have sugarcane aphids nearing flag leaf you now have three options. You may also only have a few days to act while the crop is a few weeks away from being dry enough for harvest.

1. **If the action threshold of 40% plants infested with 100 aphids per leaf (average top, middle, and lower) has been reached:** Make the application of Transform @ 1 ounce per acre. This is our only proven bullet to control this pest for this season if coverage is good enough (10 GPA ground, 5 GPA air). It is fairly expensive and comes with a 14 day pre-harvest interval. For those not wanting to make this kind of investment this late with grain prices so low, there are options 2 & 3.
2. **Harvest early:** Take the dock at the elevator rather than loose so much yield to the aphid, which can also cause serious lodging and 'gummy harvest' issues and losses.
3. **Harvest aid the infested sorghum field:** Treatments of Aim or Roundup might help dry the plant faster and leave the aphid with nothing to feed upon. This was tried with limited success in the LRGV in 2013. Aim would certainly act faster.

For haygrazer, option 2 might make the most economic sense.

In our program field in southeastern Swisher county, our producer chose option 2. This field was just days from being ready when the rapid increase in sugarcane aphid numbers was noted. This field was harvested without incident. In our program we currently have 4

more fields nearing this level of infestation that are a few weeks away from being harvest ready. I will be checking them twice weekly. BR



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