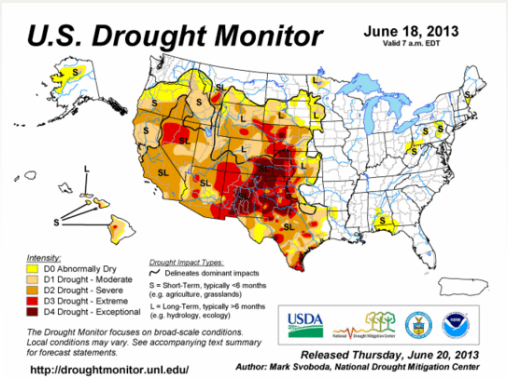
TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION

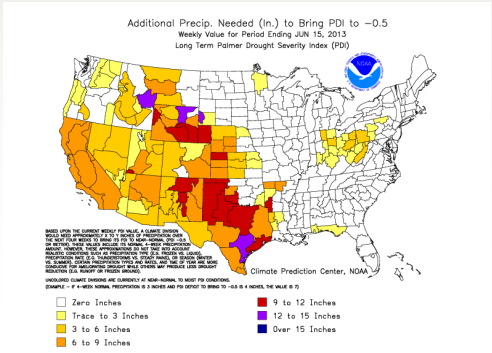
Plains Pest Management News

JUNE 24, 2013

General Situation

The general crop status remains varied between wiped out and / or barely struggling to outstanding, sometimes within the same field. The use of cover is paying dividends this season as it has offered protection from ridiculous winds from every direction. Unfortunately, the drought has even limited the amount of cover growers have been able to grow. Last week witnessed widespread scattered rain events just about every evening somewhere across Hale and Swisher Counties. Official total rainfall amounts varied between 0.4" and 4.2". We have been pleasantly surprised by lack of hail from most of these seemingly violent storms, but the extreme winds above and beyond already high daytime winds were again commonplace. Many more fields have sustained wind damage, most only to edges and wind catching slopes, but I have reports of more fields being lost. Irrigated fields could be described as having decent to good upper soil moisture, but deep moisture remains light at best. Established corn, sorghum, and the most mature cotton fields have benefited most from the rainfall, aiding overworked irrigation systems for a short term drink for an increasingly thirsty crop.





Dryland fields of any type up and growing are the oddity at this time, but a few exist in spots. Many early planted cotton and sorghum dryland fields had already sprouted and desiccated before additional rains came. Many other producers are waiting for additional rain to somewhat elevate the deep moisture situation before risking any seed for planting. At is looks today, if a field were planted quickly, it would emerge quite well, but falter for lack of deep moisture within a matter of weeks. If no additional rains come, most of these producers will look at planting wheat in the fall, if wheat seed can be found.

Weeds

Producers are doing all they can to make herbicide applications while dancing around high winds and even a little mud this past week. We are seeing some pretty good weed kill behind these sprays. Even in no-till situations that had weed escapes from the burn-down treatment, our recent sprays are knocking out most of these large weeds. The fact that we have had some higher dew points certainly helped herbicide intake, but producers do not seem to be taking any chances with escapes either. Most seem very particular about their herbicide rates and application practices and it shows. Even so, control is rarely 100%, but has stabilized somewhere near a normal surviving weed pressure season. The area is also bracing for another flush of weed germination following recent rains.

We have been fielding calls from frustrated producers that are utilizing one or more types of pre-plant herbicides for the first time in sometime. These producers are seeing an estimated 2-15% of weeds coming through the pre-plant herbicides in cotton. From an IPM standpoint, that is not that uncommon, especially when we consider the environmental conditions the area was experiencing earlier this spring. This situation highlights the need for multiple control measures. Our over the top glyphosate applications now going out are the next piece of the puzzle. The number of weeds getting this over the top spray should still be greatly reduced, justifying the pre-plant applications. I would still expect to see a handful of these surviving weeds come through the first over the top treatment too. This is the case for most of the fields we have scouted this last week. That leaves just a weed here and there. This is where the choice lay for producers. Will producers treat these weeds as 'super weeds' and attack them with additional modes of action and / or methods of control, or will they allow a few weeds per acre to slip by in an already tough economic and dry season?

I would always recommend vigilance if at all possible in dealing with this hand-full of weeds that will be surviving. If these surviving weeds are allowed to reproduce, it could mean years of heart ache for producers that let this first opportunity to stave off major and confirmed weed resistance issues for their farms. There also remains an opportunity to apply an additional residual MOA with the next over the top applications to achieve season long residual control, if producers have not already done so.

Cotton

From just south of Hale Center north through Swisher County, there are many good irrigated cotton fields. It is easy to find blown or damaged spots in most fields, but there are fields that could be sporting a few blooms by July 4th. It is more realistic to say that most should be seeing first bloom by July 15th. There were also fields still at cotyledon stage this last week and struggling to establish stands. I would consider these latter fields as 'late' in a season where plantings were already delayed. In Hale County our cotton stages ranged from cotyledon to pinhead square. In Swisher the cotton ranged from cotyledon to almost quarter grown square.

Insect Pressure:

The area looks to be on the downhill side of some pretty heavy thrips pressure. I estimate that as of June 21st, 80 to 90% of the area cotton had foliar applications made for thrips, most done in conjunction with herbicide applications. Our thrips numbers behind these applications have remained low as thrips do not seem to be moving back into cotton once treated. Other host plants such as pastures, weeds, and sorghum and corn are greening up and actively growing following the rains giving the thrips a more preferred option. Our highest thrips counts last week came from Swisher County in an untreated field with 1.8 thrips per plant. Younger cotton will remain susceptible to thrips damage until sometime about the 5th true leaf to pinhead square stage. While blanket thrips sprays are common in the area for earlier planted cotton, I suggest watching late fields closely for truly economic populations of thrips. If a foliar insecticide treatment can be avoided this late in June, it could very well save enough predators from collateral damage to prevent a potential plant bug treatment over the next few weeks. The economic threshold for thrips remains at one thrips per true leaf stage until pinhead square.

Fleahoppers are the next pest we expect to encounter as cotton matures into its reproductive phase. We have begun scouting for these plant bugs, but are yet to encounter any substantial populations. It is easy for fleahoppers to quietly sneak up on unprepared producers and scouting remains a must.

Fleahoppers have several preferred host but these guys primarily feed on silver leaf nightshade (SLN) and jump to nearby cotton once the silver leaf nightshade has been destroyed by herbicide or tillage. Fields heavy with SLN are much more likely to develop economic problems with fleahoppers than those without. Adults are about 1/7th of an inch long, extremely flighty, and pale green to greenish white in color. Nymphs of this true bug are smaller than the adult, lack wings, but are otherwise very similar. Fleahopper nymphs may appear similar to the nymphs of a freshly hatched Lygus at first glance, but the lack of prominent dark spots on their backs and their slightly 'grasshopper-like' hind legs give them away. Because Lygus are potentially much more economically damaging and not all cotton labeled insecticides will control both pests, identifying which pest is present in your field becomes very important.

Even though cotton is only a secondary host for fleahoppers they will cause significant yield loss if present at economic levels. They feed by stabbing their proboscis or piercing-sucking mouthparts into developing squares and feasting upon the nutrient rich contents. Once a square has been fed on, the cotton plant will usually shed the square, even if the feeding damage is comparatively light. We recommend that field scouts use dark colored beat-sheets to quickly find and identify cotton fleahoppers. Whole plant inspections in conjunction with the use of these 'drop-cloths' (or sometimes sweep nets) are necessary to fully determine both the population of fleahoppers and the damage they are inflicting upon a cotton field. The economic threshold for fleahoppers in match head stage cotton is 20 to 35% infested plants with square set considerations. We have not seen any in the fields yet, but we remain on the lookout for them.

Corn

Area corn continues to develop well with recent rains being a large benefit, although very few pivots have been able to rest more than a few days. Plant stage ranged from V6 through V10 on earlier corn. Our scouts only found one spider mite colony on a field margin this week. All other found mite colonies had been cleaned by predation, primarily from thrips, but several lady beetle species have been noted. Cooler, wet weather is likely to have played a part in lessening spider mite populations. With hot, dry weather in the forecast for the foreseeable future, the ideal mite situation, we should keep an eye on mite populations and watch for flares. We continue to watch for Lepidopteron whirl feeding, but have only found a few fall armyworms on field margins as well.

Sorghum

Much like corn, early planted sorghum is developing well. We are starting to pick up a few corn leaf aphids (CLA) in the occasional field. This aphid is rarely economic in modern sorghum varieties as it does not inject toxins into the plant as it feeds. There are a few sorghum hay type crops grown locally for seed that CLA can cause significant damage to, but most sorghums can tolerate up to 1,500 CLA per leaf. In fact, most entomologist view the coming of the CLA as a benefit, allowing predators and parasitoid populations to build adequately to control the more harmful greenbug and yellow sugarcane aphids (YSCA). CLA typically gather near and about the whorl and upper portions of the plant, while greenbugs feed about the middle of the plant, and YSCA feed on the lower leaves. We have not found any other aphid or Lepidopteron whorl feeding in sorghum this week, but did find one colony of spider mites in a field margin. A good population of predators is building quickly in sorghum.

I would advise producers re-planting sorghum behind failed cotton to avoid the use of long season varieties at this time. There remains plenty of time to plant and develop an early or early-mid variety. Sorghum seed is still available, but you may be given a variety you are unfamiliar with. Do please make certain of that varieties maturity rating before the seed goes in the ground.

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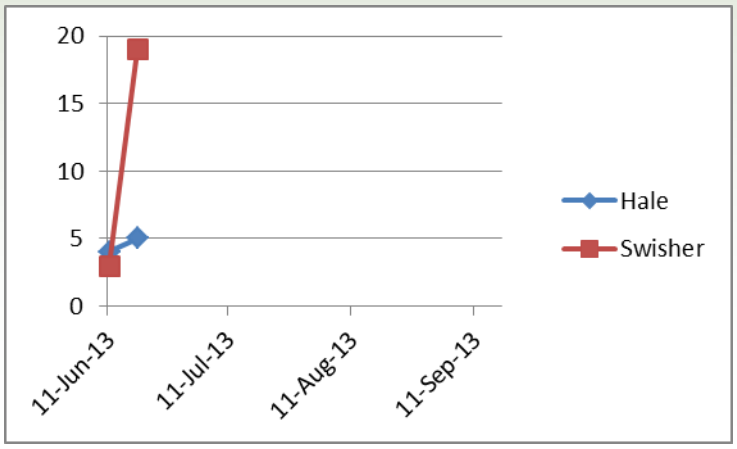
We're on the air…

"Tuesday's with Blayne" from 6-7AM on the 1090 Agri-Plex Report. 1090 AM KVOP - Plainview.

"IPM Wednesdays" from 12:30-2PM on The Fox Talk 950 Ag Show. Fox Talk 950 AM - Lubbock.

Bollworm Traps

This month we started adult bollworm trapping to better monitor the population for potential problems. Trap numbers were still what I would consider low this last week. It has been hypothesized by several area entomologists that bollworms have been either been overwintering in eastern and central Swisher County at a higher level than previously thought or migrating in from off the Caprock through the Tule Creek system earlier than the remaining area. Either situation could explain why bollworms reach economic levels earlier and are harder to control in those areas. The Swisher County trap is located on the South Tule Creek branch to monitor for this hypothesis while the Hale County Trap is in more of a textbook situation. The returns are very early, but the population was notably higher in Swisher County last week.



We will be watching these traps to get you predicted information about bollworm pests weekly.

Please call or come by if we can help,

Blayne