K-STATE Research and Extension | Meadowlark District

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Fall Armyworm Trapping Network

Scouting for fall armyworm injury isn't much fun. They don't overwinter here, migrating north each summer to lay eggs here typically sometime in July with larvae visible in late July into August. It's not a great time to be out in grasses looking for larvae feeding.

After multiple years trying to stay ahead of potential feeding pressure, a fall armyworm trapping network was initiated in Kansas last summer. Still in its infancy, it *does* provide an idea of when to at least *start* planning scouting efforts. The two traps located in the Meadowlark Extension District both confirm the arrival of fall armyworm adults - albeit in small numbers.

These adults have likely laid eggs and may result in a couple of overlapping generations through September. Damage is most likely in alfalfa, forage sorghum, and brome, often when plants are in a tender vegetative state. The regrowth of brome and alfalfa hay fields are their most likely landing spots and these stands should be inspected regularly for larvae feeding injury.

Initial injury symptoms will look like 'windowpane' injury from tiny larvae chewing off a single layer of the plant's cells but not through the entire leaf surface. Larvae can be difficult to see, often hiding around the plant's base, particularly when warm. As larvae grow, feeding increases resulting in ragged leaf edges or complete leaf stripping under high feeding pressures.

If you see 25-30 percent of plants exhibiting windowpane injury, begin scouting multiple times weekly. Larvae increase in size at an exponential rate, and so do their food requirements. Later instars (three quarters of an inch long and longer) do the most damage while being the least susceptible to insecticides. Damage will continue until larvae reach maturity.

Should we be concerned? Past history suggests we should be aware and pay attention to the near-term forecast. Adult numbers being reported do *not* suggest an 'outbreak', but monitoring is needed. We've also been fortunate locally to see decent forage growth (and regrowth on already harvested hay fields) to provide plenty foliage for them to feed on. If conditions worsen, that could change, but with any luck, there's enough 'food' over a large enough area to spread out feeding pressure.

Regular scouting will be important through the summer. Later harvested hay fields with tender regrowth will be the most attractive feeding areas. Look for spots not greening up as potential problem areas. Birds may congregate to feed on larvae and can indicate feeding pressure as well. Updated numbers will be available here if adult numbers become concerning.