Sugarcane Aphid, Sorghum Headworm, and Sorghum Midge Management in Double-Cropped or Late-maturing Sorghum

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We are still getting reports of sugarcane aphids infesting sorghum, including double-cropped sorghum. To date, sugarcane aphids have been reported in sorghum fields in more than 14 counties (and are probably present in any Oklahoma county with sorghum). Josh Lofton, Cropping System Specialist at OSU reported sorghum fields were infested in Major, Woods, and Garfield counties. Rick Kochenower, National Sales Agronomist with Sorghum Partners, reported sugarcane aphids infesting sorghum in Ottawa county.

Do not ignore your double-cropped sorghum. Throughout the summer, we have seen winged sugarcane aphid move from maturing fields into younger fields. Despite that, there are some fields that have not reached treatment thresholds, especially fields that were planted with varieties that have been identified as resistant or tolerant to the sugarcane aphid. Currently the suggested treatment threshold is to treat when 20-30 percent of the plants are infested with one or more established colonies of sugarcane aphids. An established colony is an adult (winged or wingless) accompanied by one or more nymphs.
A complicating factor in later maturing sorghum has to do with sorghum headworms. Both corn earworm and fall armyworms have been abundant this year. While sorghum is out of the woods for headworm damage once it reaches hard-dough, fields that are heading, flowering or setting seed through soft-dough are vulnerable to yield robbers like headworms. Check out the Headworm Sequential Sampling and Decision Support system, (http://entoplp.okstate.edu/shwweb/index.htm). This computer-based program will calculate an economic threshold for headworms and provide a simple sampling plan, using your input on plant population, crop value and control costs to let you know if that threshold has been reached.

If you find that you need to control both headworms and aphids, a tank mix of Sivanto or Transform with Blackhawk, Prevathon or Belt would be options. Data that I have reviewed from other insecticide trials suggests that Prevathon and Blackhawk provide excellent control of headworms.

At this time of year, sorghum midge may also be a problem in blooming sorghum. Scout for midge by placing a 1-gallon plastic bag over each head, and “thump it”. The midges will fly upward. Remove the bag and contents and look for midges inside the plastic baggie. Check 25-40 flowering heads per field. Make sure you have great eyesight, your reading glasses, or a 10x magnifier, because this reddish colored fly is tiny, measures about 1/16 inch. Without disturbing the plant, look for small gnat-sized flies that are moving about the head or are laying eggs on flowers with extended anthers. The best time to scout for sorghum midge is when they are most active (9:00 - 11:00 am). Begin scouting when the heads first emerged heads begin pollinating and continue every 3 days until the bloom is finished.

The economic threshold is 1 midge per head for susceptible varieties or 5 midges per head for resistant varieties. Contact your seed dealer for information on its midge-resistance package. Blackhawk is also registered for control of sorghum midge, so if your scouting reveals a sorghum midge infestation that has reached threshold it would be your best choice, as it will also control headworms. Consult CR-7170, Management of Insect and Mite Pests in Sorghum for additional information on sorghum insect pest management.

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