



# Pest e-alerts



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## **The Beginning of Fall Brings Continued Challenges for Alfalfa Growers**

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As the weather moderates and temperatures turn cooler alfalfa growers must remain vigilant in monitoring newly planted and existing alfalfa stands for fall armyworm (FAW) presence. Reports from late August indicated high FAW activity in many summer crops including pasture and alfalfa. Current reports from around the state continue to indicate fall armyworm activity in these crops as well as newly planted wheat. In addition to checking wheat, increased efforts should also be applied to assessing newly planted alfalfa for fall armyworm presence. Infestations of fall armyworm are most likely to occur in late summer to early fall before frost (September – October). However, depending on weather conditions, fall armyworm can remain later in the season. We won't get relief from fall armyworms until we get a killing frost. Recent heavy rains may help to curtail existing larvae, but if warm weather persists for an extended period into fall populations could rebound causing potential problems, especially in seedling stands. A common threshold for most crops and grass pastures is 2-3 larvae per square foot. However, one to two larvae per square foot can easily destroy seedling alfalfa, and higher populations (10+) per square foot have been observed to be detrimental to taller more established stands. Fall armyworm are generally most active early morning or late afternoon. Scout by examining several areas in the field as well as border areas they may be moving in from. Look for signs of damage including "window paned" leaves or defoliation of plants. In alfalfa seedling stands the entire plant may be cut down. Check Current Report; CR7150-Alfalfa Forage Insect Control for more information on

rates and products registered for fall armyworm control.



Another pest to keep in mind during this time of year is spotted alfalfa aphids (SAA). With a moderate summer lacking excessive temperatures and timely rainfall we haven't had as many calls this season as in the past several years regarding SAA. However, spotted alfalfa aphids in newly seeded fall stands of alfalfa could still be a problem. Spotted alfalfa aphids can be observed year round, but typically like hotter and dry

conditions of late summer and are less of a problem throughout cooler periods of fall and winter. While the recent cool down and rain events should help in control, a delayed hard freeze and prolonged moderate temperatures heading into fall could provide an opportunity for populations to build. With threshold treatments based on an average of only one aphid per stem in newly planted alfalfa scouting can be critical in stand preservation. The stem sampling method is likely to provide a more accurate estimate of aphid numbers. When using the stem sampling method, select 30 stems at random over the field and place in a container (preferably white in color). Shake aphids from the stems into the container and carefully estimate the number collected. Divide by the stem number to calculate the average per stem. Measure ten stems to determine the average plant height (EPP-7184, Alfalfa Aphids in Oklahoma). Refer to (Table 1.) and (CR7150- Alfalfa Forage Insect Control) for treatment guidelines.

**Table 1. Threshold levels (Aphid/stem) on susceptible varieties of alfalfa at varying growth stages**

|                                 | Pea Aphid     | Blue Aphid      | Spotted Aphid |
|---------------------------------|---------------|-----------------|---------------|
| Seedling Alfalfa                | 5             | 1               | 1             |
| Established Alfalfa (<10" tall) | 40<br>(300)** | 10<br>(100-200) | 10<br>100-200 |
| Established Alfalfa (>10" tall) | 75<br>(400)   | 30<br>(300)     | 30<br>(300)   |

Numbers in parenthesis indicate number/20 sweeps of aphid needed to reach threshold level using a standard 15 inch sweep net.

## **Disease and Insect Diagnostic Laboratory**

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