

Alfalfa

This is Ag Outlook on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Well this has been a weird year for everything, alfalfa included. Dry weather along with cold weather in March and April really messed up the alfalfa weevil and very few fields ultimately had to be sprayed. But this also meant that many other insects, that we may not normally encounter, were showing up in abundance. I've had some alfalfa samples brought in to me from folks that were out there swathing. There are a ton of aphids, both spotted alfalfa aphid as well as pea aphid. BUT there were also a ton of ladybugs and ladybug larvae - if you don't know what ladybug larvae look like, they are little black and orange worms with legs that sort of look like miniature Gila Monsters. Ladybug adults and larvae have huge appetites for aphids. The crazy part was all the other insects that I was seeing in these freshly cut alfalfa samples. So many insects that would have been normally killed by the weevil sprays were out there. The other insect that some folks were running into were spider mites that were producing miles of webbing. Crazy year to be sure. Ignore all of these insects though as they will die or leave the fields after they are cut. Now, the other thing to be aware of is that until we get some good rain, many of these fields are going to sit there and do nothing. If you don't have enough alfalfa to swath, just leave it alone. Once it starts to rain, the new growth will come up from the crown and you can eventually take the remnants of the uncut first growth with the 2nd cutting! This has been Ag Outlook on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Armyworms?

This is Ag Outlook on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I had one call last week about armyworms in wheat. The first thing I thought was, sure, why not - everything else is going wrong for the wheat crop this year. But my second thought was really? Armyworms are generally more of a problem in warm and MOIST springs. For a reminder armyworms are in that group that produce adult moths that we frequently call millers. Larvae can be a problem from late April through early June, basically up until the time that the wheat ripens and dries down. Generally they are leaf feeders and can consumer a fair number of leaves, mostly in the last 3 to 5 days of their lives.

Armyworms are also the ones that will move from leaves up to the heads as the plant dries down and can sometimes be found feeding on beards and clipping off heads. They rarely become a large enough population to be of concern. I can think of one or two springs in the past 35+ years that we've treated fields. Treatment thresholds for armyworms are eached at 4 to 5 per foot of row. If the larvae are smaller we can treat when we hit 6 to 8 per foot of row. When you go out to look for these rascals, head out about mid morning. At that time they will be up on the plants, feeding on leaves and should be very easy to see. Don't just look at one foot of row, look at 5 to 10 feet of row over several portions of the field. In the case of the field when I was contacted, it turned out that the actual number was not 4 or 5, but a fraction of one per foot of row. No action needed! This has been Ag Outlook on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Temperature Inversion Monitoring

This is Ag Outlook on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. As I was writing this column last week, I was all set to talk this morning about post emerge dicamba applications which would include Xtendimax, FeXapan and Engina herbicides. These are the products that have the 30 or so conditions that must be monitored and checked before, during and after application. Two things that I wanted to mention were inversion layers and sensitive crops. Hopefully you know where sensitive crops are around your fields and I would encourage you to check out the Driftwatch.org website. There are several registered fields and beehives in Geary County so please pay heed to those. And I was all set to talk about the need to regularly check the Kansas Mesonet weather monitoring website and specifically the inversion monitoring page to see if you were at risk of running into an inversion layer. The web address is mesonet.k-state.edu. In graphical form you can quickly look at a weather site near you to see if there is a risk of an inversion layer. But then, the middle of last week K-State had a fire at Hale Library which is where all the computer servers are located which meant that most all of the websites went off line. So, pay attention to calm or nearly calm conditions early in the morning or late in the evening, which is when these inversions are most likely to occur. Pay attention to label directions as there are many. Remember that if you are applying the dicamba yourself you have to keep all those records. If you hire it done, it's on the applicator! This has been Ag Outlook on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Post wheat harvest

This is Ag Outlook on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. The bad news is that we've had the least amount of rain from September 1st of last year through the middle of the May than any other time since 1931. It's dry and things aren't looking much better. It's even drier than it was in that horribly dry period of 1988 and 89. The good news is that the wheat does look better, in most fields, than the wheat did in the spring of 1989. Regardless of what happens between now and harvest we are going to have some things to deal with as we move on through the summer. IF it starts to get rainy, which I have no real belief that it will, we will have weed issues as many of these fields are thin. Bare soil, sunlight and rain are the perfect triangle for weeds. This year's wheat crop will have a lot of shrunken and shriveled kernels. Drought and high temperatures will cause a lot of kernels that initially set to abort. Now, while these will blow right out the back of the combine, they'll still sprout and grow just fine if we have even a half inch of rain after harvest. This will lead to a lot of volunteer wheat which then leads to a green bridge to help Hessian fly and wheat curl mites, the vector for wheat streak mosaic, to overwinter. Due diligence to get these fields destroyed prior to adjacent field wheat planting come fall is crucial. There may be some incentive to let these fields grow and graze them as emergency forage and I understand that. But if these fields are within a half mile of a field going to wheat this fall, they really need to be destroyed 2 weeks before sowing. This has been Ag Outlook on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

A Drought has a Long Tail

This is Ag Outlook on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Floods and drought are simply part of the Great Plains ecosystem and climate. Average weather doesn't really exist, it's just a mathematical calculation of the extremes we face over a 30 year time frame. Ultimately it doesn't matter if the past 9 months have been the driest, second driest or third driest similar period on record. It is dry and more than qualifies for a drought. We have been in a serious drought with extreme drought nipping at our borders. It's probably only a matter of time. The old timers have a saying that a drought always has a long tail and they are so very right. Even if we return to normal rainfall during this new month, we are going to be dealing with issues over the next year. I talked about volunteer wheat yesterday. If July and August were to turn off wet, and there is a chance of that, but I doubt it, we would have so much volunteer wheat that these fields would be a green carpet. When the rain starts, those dry ponds will fill up and you'll be cursing the same problems that you did before it dried up. Take advantage of these times to clean them out. If it stays dry we will see loss of stand in alfalfa fields. This will shorten the life of the alfalfa field and will require replacement sooner than you may had anticipated. I won't even go into the potential impacts on bromegrass. I will say that bromegrass and alfalfa crowns are somewhat fragile when they are dormant during drought so please reduce vehicle traffic on them as much as possible while things are dry! This has been Ag Outlook on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.