

<http://www.oznet.ksu.edu/entomology/extension/extension.htm>

Kansas Insect Newsletter

For Agribusinesses, Applicators, Consultants, and Extension Personnel

Department of Entomology
239 West Waters Hall
K-State Research and Extension
Manhattan, KS 66506-4027

Tel: 785-532-5891

Fax: 785-532-6258



August 18, 2006 No 21

“Worms” in Sorghum:

Sorghum “headworms” reportedly are starting to show up on sorghum heads throughout south central and southeast Kansas. Sorghum “headworm” infestations are often not noticed until the worms are mature and thus, fairly large. This means then, that most of the feeding, and thus damage, has been completed. Scouting, therefore, needs to start now to detect any infestations as they are starting, while the worms are small. The most common “worms” associated with sorghum head feeding are larvae of the corn earworm and fall armyworm. Feeding damage is similar for both insects however their biology's are somewhat different.

Corn earworm moths generally seem to prefer to lay their eggs in corn, however as the corn plants mature the moths will lay eggs in sorghum or soybeans. Sorghum is vulnerable to larval feeding damage generally from the time it starts blooming through the milk stage. Early detection of earworm infestations is the key consideration before the larvae mature and thus cause the most damage. Generally, the larvae will cause about a 5% yield loss per larva/head. Thus, treatment decisions should be based upon expected yield, crop value, and treatment cost. As these larvae are in the head and thus not protected by foliage, treatment often provides good control.

Fall armyworms generally migrate into Kansas in July and lay eggs on corn, sorghum, soybeans, etc. Damage to sorghum may continue until frost. Leaf feeding may be especially evident to late planted sorghum as these larvae cause rather large, highly visible holes due to their feeding in the whorls. This leaf feeding is usually of little consequence as sorghum is fairly resilient and the larvae are not vulnerable to insecticide treatments anyway as they are protected inside the whorl. Head feeding by fall armyworm larvae however, may cause considerable yield loss. Feeding and damage potential of fall armyworm larvae is comparable to that of the corn earworm. Treatment recommendations therefore are the same: expect ca. 5% yield loss/larva/head from bloom through the milk stage and good control is often achieved but should be initiated, if justified, while worms are small. While scouting for corn earworms/fall armyworms growers in

southern Kansas should also be aware of sorghum webworms. Unlike corn earworms or fall armyworms, sorghum webworms are small, striped worms and very fuzzy in appearance. They do more damage to late planted fields from August to October and treatment should be considered if a field average of 5 webworms/head is detected in sorghum heads that have not yet passed the milk stage.

Please refer to the KSU Sorghum Insect Management Guides, 2006 available at all County Extension offices or visit the world wide web at: <http://www.oznet.ksu.edu>.

Jeff Whitworth

Brand names appearing in this publication are for product identification purposes only. No endorsement is intended, nor is criticism implied of similar products not mentioned.

Sincerely,

Jeff Whitworth
Extension Specialist
Entomology (Crops)