Fall Armyworm Notice: Check Your Wheat Early and Often!

Tom A. Royer, Extension Entomologist

Our new Extension small grains specialist, Dr. David Marburger has experienced lots of “firsts” since arriving in Oklahoma, from tornado warnings to earthquakes. Yesterday he was introduced to another “first” that seems to be developing into an annual fall challenge for Oklahoma wheat producers. He received photos of a newly-planted wheat field, at the 2-leaf stage, that was “drying up” even though it had plenty of soil moisture. The producer told him that the wheat plants went from green to dried up over a 2-day period. A closer examination revealed the leaves had been stripped of their green tissue, and there were lots of small caterpillars “loitering around”.

The culprit: fall armyworms. Fall armyworms have been very active this summer and fall. They showed up early and in large numbers this growing season. As wheat planting progresses, our producers need to check fields regularly after seedling emergence. Scout for fall armyworms by examining plants in several (5 or more) locations in the field. They are most active in the morning or late afternoon.
Look for “window paned” leaves and count all sizes of larvae. Examine plants along the field margin as well as in the interior, because they sometimes move in from road ditches and weedy areas. The suggested treatment threshold is 2-3 larvae per linear foot of row in wheat with active feeding. Numerous insecticides are registered for control, but they are much more susceptible when caterpillars are small. We won’t get relief from fall armyworms until we get a killing frost, so keep vigilant!

Consult the newly updated OSU Fact Sheets **CR-7194 Management of Insect and Mite Pests of Small Grains** for control suggestions.

Co-Editors: Eric Rebek and Justin Talley; Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service

The pesticide information presented in this publication was current with federal and state regulations at the time of printing. The user is responsible for determining that the intended use is consistent with the label of the product being used. Use pesticides safely. Read and follow label directions. The information given herein is for educational purposes only. Reference to commercial products or trade names is made with the understanding that no discrimination is intended and no endorsement by the Cooperative Extension Service is implied.

Oklahoma State University, in compliance with Title VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Executive Order 11246 as amended, and Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (Higher Education Act), the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and other federal and state laws and regulations, does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, genetic information, sex, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, disability, or status as a veteran, in any of its policies, practices or procedures. This provision includes, but is not limited to admissions, employment, financial aid, and educational services. The Director of Equal Opportunity, 408 Whitehurst, OSU, Stillwater, OK 74078-1035; Phone 405-744-5371; email: eeo@okstate.edu has been designated to handle inquiries regarding non-discrimination policies: Director of Equal Opportunity. Any person (student, faculty, or staff) who believes that discriminatory practices have been engaged in based on gender may discuss his or her concerns and file informal or formal complaints of possible violations of Title IX with OSU’s Title IX Coordinator 405-744-9154.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Director of Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma. This publication is issued by Oklahoma State University as authorized by the Vice President, Dean, and Director of the Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources.