



EXTENSION

Pest e-alerts



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Alfalfa Insect Update – 8 June 2020

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I've gotten a couple calls regarding increased moth activity in alfalfa fields and if there is need for concern. An increase in moth and butterfly activity is normal this time of year and simply means a presence of caterpillars. Activity of foliage feeding caterpillars begins in May and continues through October. The foliage-feeder complex in alfalfa includes the corn earworm, green cloverworm, yellow-striped armyworm, fall armyworm, alfalfa caterpillar, webworms, and several other species which complete 4-6 generations each year, approximately one generation in each crop of alfalfa. Adults of these species lay eggs in foliage beginning soon after each harvest, and caterpillars tend to increase both in number and size as each crop of alfalfa grows. The species present at a given time may be highly variable.

In most instances, when moisture and growing conditions are sufficient, mere caterpillar presence is not of significant concern. However, when crop conditions are not ideal due to dry weather, uneven growth, and lack of natural enemies, large numbers of these caterpillars may completely defoliate alfalfa consuming the leaves and limiting feed value.

Sampling and Control. The most effective sampling approach for these caterpillars is sweeping with a standard 15-inch diameter net. A set of 20 sweeps should be made in each 5-10 acre field area. If numbers exceed 5-6 larvae/sweep, insecticide should be applied or, if the time for harvest is near, alfalfa may be cut to remove the habitat for the caterpillars. Additional information on control of foliage-feeding caterpillars can be found in OSU Extension Facts No. 7150.

Common foliage feeding caterpillars found in alfalfa:



Alfalfa Caterpillar



Adult Butterfly



Yellow-striped armyworm



Adult Moth



Green cloverworm



Adult Moth



Corn earworm



Adult Moth

Disease and Insect Diagnostic Laboratory

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