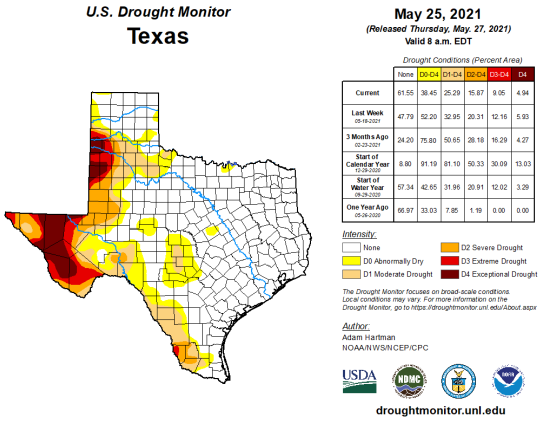
TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION

Plains Pest Management News

MAY, 27 2021

Hello 2021 Growing Season!

May has been surprisingly cool and wet. Some did predict a wet May, but after so many dry and windy days of the terrible drought we have been under, I am not sure many of us believed it. The proof is in our area fields right now with delayed plantings. In addition to cool conditions unconducive to cotton seedling health early in the month, very few were willing to commit to or invest in an irrigation only crop under those dry conditions with the high cost of irrigation while facing the reality of our irrigation system capacities.



These rains we have received have been 'streaky' and have come over an extended period, but I believe just about every acre has had some moisture relief just in time. Once there was some proven environmental support, plantings began a touch later than 'normal.' It is difficult to determine just how far behind the area is in plantings with a wide disparity in the amount planted. This seems to depend upon where the rains streaked through and how much fell. Some producers are almost finished while others have the bulk of their acres ahead. There are concerns about looming insurance cutoff dates nearing with continued rain chances extending for the next several successive days. While several producers are feeling uncomfortable about the calendar date for their intended cotton acres, there remains ample time and potential heat units through the end of May for irrigated profitability and a bit farther into June for dryland cotton. That is, if fields dry out in time. Missing a cotton planting window might not be as serious an issue this year with potential secondary crop prices holding at profitable levels and all important rain fall soaking in and in the forecast.

Planting cotton on the Hale/Swisher line between rains earlier this week.

Cotton

At our last scurried scout patrol and hurried conversations with our Plains Pest Management scouting program growers before the most recent rains of Wednesday, I estimate that most area producers have somewhere between 35% and 95% of their intended cotton acres in. If I had to pinpoint a specific number, my impression is that about 85% of these intended acres are planted. Of the planted acres, very few fields were established and ready for plant per acre stand counts. These germinating plants do have a plethora of issues to overcome before we can deem them as a profitable stand. There are the usual crust issues with thick shank and heavy hail has come across with several of the streaky rain events. Cool, damp conditions are usually conducive to seedling diseases. These will undoubtedly take a toll this year, but we are not picking up an inordinate amount yet. Wireworms can also be found in just about every field scouted, but these too do not seem to be forefront issue for our fields so far. If full emergence is delayed for other reasons, the wireworm impact will increase. I am most concerned with cold shock. We are finding this commonly in our earlier planted fields. Yet, it is not a give to see it regularly in all early planted fields and later planted fields are not immune. Location, rains, irrigation, cover, and variable sunshine are likely factors separating fields that will likely have issues and those that do not.

A healthy cotton stand establishing earlier this week. Hopefully, hail missed this one.

We need to be scouting for all of these potential germination issues soon. Finding issue fields quickly and determining the need to keep, replant, or be planted to a secondary crop can be the difference in a profitable crop and failure. For all of these issues we will likely need to 'scratch' the seedlings out of the seedbed and evaluate them before emergence. Cold shocked seedings will have odd knots or crooks in the developing root. These enlarged knots and or crooks might not prevent establishment, but will seriously hinder the plants ability to produce, keep up with environmental demands, and possibly even survive extreme conditions. This comes from a compromised, blocked, crooked, or otherwise malformed xylem and phloem. When looking for this type of damage, you will need to determine what percent of the seedlings will suffer from cold shock. If the percentage is too high, the field will remain 'sickly' all season and be under responsive to all inputs. This inevitably results in underperformance in financial loss no matter the input level.

Cold shock damage from a few years ago.

Seedlings should also be checked for wireworm bites as we rarely see the actual pest when scouting for them. Wireworm feeding along the seedling root can be severely damaging, but a bite near the crook or on the growing point will result in seedling death. Determining seedling disease issues before emergence can be difficult as slight issues expand rapidly once the plant establishes. Seedings exhibiting seedling diseases will have discolored and often diminished roots showing a lack of fibrous roots. The outer edge of infected roots will often sluff off. Seedling diseases can prevent establishment, but more often seriously infected plants cannot keep up with environmental conditions once temperatures rise and soon die off. Cotton seedlings are especially sensitive to hail, especially heavy hails that are small in diameter. When determining whether or not a field has survived a hail event, it is best to evaluate the growing point almost exclusively. The plant can loose all cotyledon or true leaves, but as long as there is a viable growing point, the plant will quickly recover this early in the season.

Wireworm bites on cotton seedling roots.

Regardless of what issue or combination of seedling issues you field is facing, there are plant per acre populations repeatedly proven in research trials and practical experience to hold as a minimum cotton plant populations. These hold true just so long as in-row gaps in the healthy plant stands do not extend longer than 1 foot. If the yield goal is 1,200-1,500 pounds or higher locally the final population needs to be about 30,000 healthy plants per acre. For yield goals of 800-1,200 per acre, a final healthy population can drop to around 27,000. Dryland populations are a bit more forgiving with a profitable population (with in-season moisture) of around 13,000 healthy plants per acre.

Typical seedling disease damage.

It is a bit early for thrips evaluations for the '21 crop. While some thrips can be seen swarming, my impression of the population is fairly light. This is probably due to the severe drought conditions we experienced for the balance of the winter and spring. Most of the dryland acres of wheat desiccated past the point of support or attractiveness for large numbers of thrips. We also have pastures, early planted grain crops and other more preferred host plant options for the thrips greening up. So far in our limited scouting of cotyledon stage cotton, numbers have been very low compared to average.

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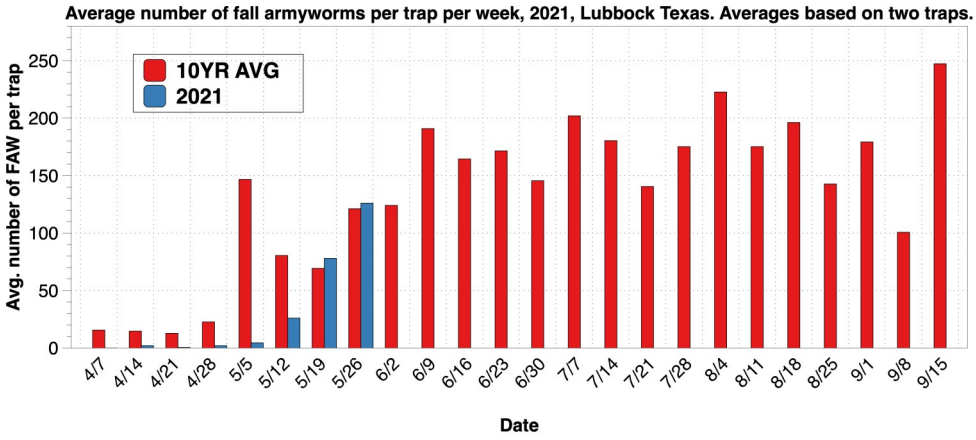
Corn & Sorghum

It will be impossible to determine how much of our area grain crops are planted at this point. It is very likely we will have an early planted crop of grain and a late planted crop that will be planted either after a crop failure or as planting deadlines are past as fields were unable to be planted. I can say that our early crops range in stage from V2 to V5 and are doing great so far. No pest issues have been noted in either corn or sorghum so far in our fields. Some have had hail damage, but at this early stage the growing point was still below ground. The damage looks very bad, but the fields are already recovering and should not show any long term issue from this hail event.

Emerging sorghum earlier this month.



We will be placing our adult bollworm monitoring traps next week.

Blayne Reed