News Column

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**Update on sugarcane aphid in Kansas grain sorghum fields**

Farmers that have grain sorghum and forage sorghum are aware of a new pest Sugarcane Aphid (SCA) that was expected to arrive this year in Kansas sorghum fields. It has arrived in Kansas and thus far been found in Sedgwick, Butler, Sumner, and Cowley counties, with a new infestation found Thursday in Pawnee County. The Pawnee County infestation is a small one, but it appears they have been there for a while.

The infestations in fields in Sedgwick, Butler, Sumner and Cowley counties have also been there for a while and in most of those fields, the aphid populations have been heavy. So what does this mean to farmers around here? Be scouting your grain sorghum and forage sorghum fields at least weekly if not twice a week.

I do not want to put everyone in panic mode, our grain sorghum is maturing along nicely and the grain is only at risk up until it turns color. If the aphids do arrive here, most of our grain sorghum may be advanced enough in maturity that economic damage would be minimal and many are swathing down their hay crop by now.

Harvesting problems can be associated with heavy infestations of the SCA the insect has piercing mouth parts that pierce and suck on the plants sap and they secrete out the other end sticky honeydew onto the leaves below where they are feeding. It is this sticky substance that can cause combine harvesting problems, especially when it fouls the panicle. However, for this to happen, the infestation would not only have to be heavy but fairly wide-spread throughout the field.

SCA's are small; pale whitish to light yellow with dark cornicles (paired tailpipe like structures on the rear of the abdomen) that contrast with the remainder of the body. They are all female, and reproduce asexually. Adults give birth to live nymphs that are themselves already pregnant with embryos inside them. These young nymphs mature and reproduce in about 7 days' time, depending on temperature.

The best way to scout for these aphids is to look first on the upper surface of leaves for a shiny veneer of honeydew; it will be sticky. If you find that, then look for SCA on the underside of a leaf above the honeydew. For a great reference from Texas A&M AgriLife Extension to aid in steps for scouting, identification and estimating the number of aphids per leaf with photos, type into your internet browser "sugarcane aphid scouting card".

LSU AgCenter and Texas A&M Agrilife has set a preliminary threshold on boot/milk stage grain sorghum of 50-150 aphids per leaf on average, with 20 percent of plants infested. With the aphids' ability to

reproduce so quickly, they can get past the threshold in a very short time, so scouting fields regularly is the best first line of defense. If it is determined that an insecticide is needed, Transform is the material of choice, preferably applied in a large volume of water (10-20 gal per acre). Sivanto is also approved, but it appears to require a higher rate to achieve similar results and ends up being considerably more expensive.

Bottom line is don't panic but be scouting your fields often. If you have any questions or need further information contact your local K-State County Extension Office.