K-STATE Research and Extension | Wildcat District

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Fall Armyworms

I, along with several teammates, have had many conversations about fall armyworms. Due to the lush plant growth that we've experienced this year, along with the timely northern wind from all parts south of us, armyworm numbers are likely higher this year than normal.

Fall Armyworm does not overwinter in Kansas; the moth blows into our area from the Gulf Coast and southern Florida, where it's active year-round. In Kansas, we can generally start seeing these creatures in June; two full generations are possible.

In the larval forms, armyworms are voracious eaters, causing defoliation and stunting plants. Forage crops are susceptible to damage, along with most row crops and landscaping plants. Forage crop fields can rapidly decline from fall armyworm feeding as large numbers of caterpillars can be present, consuming leaf material.

Fall armyworms are lepidopteran insects that have four life stages: egg, larva, pupa, and adult. Larvae generally range from 1 to 1.5 inches long, depending on growth stage, and are greenish to brown with alternating dark and light stripes that run the length of their body. The adult moths are tan with bronze front wings and a single white dot in the middle. Their wings measure about 1.5 inches across when expanded.

A species often confused with the fall armyworm is the true armyworm. Fall armyworm has a noticeable inverted "Y" on its head, while true armyworm does not. Additionally, the thickest stripe on the side of the fall armyworm caterpillar will be dark, while on the true armyworm, the thickest stripe is tan to orange.

Caterpillars increase in size at an exponential rate, and most of the feeding occurs during the later stage of development. It is critical to scout early and treat, if needed, when the caterpillars are less than an inch long. Larger caterpillars are harder to control and do the most damage.

Producers are encouraged to scout at-risk crops a couple of times each week for the remainder of the growing season. During hot days, check the lower parts of the plant or the soil surface where they may be hiding from the harsh temperatures. Another method is to run your hands across a 1- to 2-square-foot area to knock the caterpillars to the soil surface. Then, simply inspect the soil for dislodged caterpillars. Also look for window-paning; chewing almost through the leaf, but not

quite. Often, larger caterpillars are found along with younger ones. Scout several areas; the spread of this insect is not uniform within fields or pastures.

Treatment thresholds are reached when there are four to five caterpillars, or notable damage, per square foot. Pastures can be treated with a number of insecticides; see the chart included.

Forage crops close to harvest that become infested with fall armyworms should be harvested rather than treated, even if a few growing days are forfeited.

Chemical Name	Trade Name
alpha-cypermethrin	Fastac CS
beta-cyfluthrin	Baythroid XL
bifenthrin	numerous products
carbaryl	Sevin
chlorantraniliprole	Vantacore
cyfluthrin	Tombstone
lambda-cyhalothrin+chlorantraniliprole	Besiege
lambda-cyhalothrin	numerous products
methomyl	Lannate
spinosad	Blackhawk

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