

## CONTROL POTATO LEAFHOPPERS IN ALFALFA

Potato leafhoppers are starting to injure alfalfa in many areas. Scouting for these insects and protecting your alfalfa from injury may be needed in your fields.

Potato leafhoppers are tiny, yellowish-green, wedge-shaped insects. They blow into our region from the southeast during late spring through mid-summer. Leafhoppers turn alfalfa yellow and stunt growth, and they especially hurt new seedlings.

An early symptom of leafhopper damage is a triangular or V-shaped yellow or purple area at the tip of alfalfa leaves. This discoloration is caused by a toxin the leafhopper injects into the alfalfa plant as it sucks out plant juices. As feeding continues, the entire plant can turn yellow and growth may stop.

Check fields at least weekly for leafhoppers before symptoms appear. Don't wait! If you detect leafhoppers early and they are still present, insecticides can kill them easily. You may need to spray a couple times, though, since leafhoppers can migrate from other fields and reinfest your sprayed field.

However, if your alfalfa already is yellow and stunted, do not spray. Instead, first mow your alfalfa to remove affected plant tissue and to stimulate new growth. Unmown plants might not grow much more all year, lowering yield and potentially leading to stand loss over winter. After mowing newly seeded fields, spray insecticide when regrowth begins to protect that growth. But, don't automatically spray established stands. Instead, scout new regrowth at least weekly for leafhoppers. If they reappear, then use insecticides before much damage occurs.

More information, especially about threshold levels and insecticides to help you protect your alfalfa from potato leafhoppers is available on-line and at local extension offices.

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