

June 26, 2017

## WORMS AND BUGS CAUSING PROBLEMS FOR ALFALFA

From alfalfa weevil larvae and adults to potato leafhoppers to army worms, cutworms, and alfalfa caterpillars to all sorts of aphids, somebody, somewhere has had enough of each of these insects feeding on their alfalfa to hurt new seedlings or regrowth. If you've been lucky enough to avoid these problems thus far, don't assume you are safe for this year. Large numbers of butterflies and moths are flying around most fields, so another generation of many insects could occur anytime.

I'd love to generalize and tell you exactly how many insects per square foot or sweep of a net is needed to economically justify a control treatment. But each insect is different. It can range from one spotted alfalfa aphid per seedling to 100 pea aphids on 20-inch alfalfa. Or from one or two armyworms per square foot in new stands to at least 10 alfalfa caterpillars per sweep in established stands.

What we use for control also varies. Simply cutting often works for many soft bodied insects. Control using natural organisms like the Bt in Dipel and Thuricide will work for some insects. And of course, insecticides. But what to use will differ for each insect.

So my take home message today is to look and identify. Look for slow regrowth or weak seedlings and look for insects that might cause the problem. Be sure to dig in the soil and dead litter to find insects hiding during the day. Then identify exactly what the insect is, taking it to your county extension office if necessary. Remember, many insects you find will be beneficial or unimportant.

And finally, use appropriate treatments to protect your alfalfa.

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