

---

## ALFALFA AND WHEAT

### ALFALFA

Fields have a kind of yellowish appearance, growth in some places is kind of twisted, and growth is slow. Why does the alfalfa look so punk? The biggest reason is the plants are still recovering from the frost injury. It is possible that the second cutting buds were just beginning formation when the frost occurred and were damaged when the first cutting was killed. The yellowish appearance is due to leaf injury from wind and rain and light hail and a strong dose of spring black stem and leaf spot. This alfalfa disease is damaging the leaves and stems and will likely result in the loss of many lower leaves. We already know the first cutting is not going to be very good. This loss of leaves is not going to help the quality or the yield.

I talked with Dr Bruce Anderson, Extension Forage Specialist at UNL about cutting early and moving on with a second cutting. His best advice at this time is not to cut until we are fully developed to first bloom. The alfalfa plants need time to recover in order to ensure a stronger plant to produce a second crop. This would put cutting time at the end of May or early in June. There is not a lot you can do to help except be patient.

### WHEAT

Spraying fungicide on wheat is a profitable practice if wheat yields are expected to be 50 bu/ac plus and wheat price is good. While we may not have a lot of 50 bushel wheat this year, the price is extra good. No one can predict if fungicide treatments it will pay dividends in any given year. It is likely that returns over a 5-year period would be 150-200% with that return coming in approximately 3 of those years. That would give us a 60% chance of return in any given year. If budgets are tight and expenses need to be controlled, passing on fungicide treatments is okay.

There are "oat bird cherry aphids" in the wheat with variances from low levels of 1-2 aphids per stem to some reports of 40+ per stem. These are a dark aphid which is quite small. In fields I have surveyed the ladybug beetles are doing a pretty good job of controlling the aphids. Adult lady beetles eat 2-3 aphids per day, and their larvae eat 6-8 aphids per day. It doesn't take to long before the aphid population is all eaten and the lady beetles are on the move to the next aphid pasture. If you are going to treat your wheat fields with fungicides check the aphid population and if there are 5 "oat bird cherry aphids" per stem or higher, with very little ladybug activity then I would consider adding an insecticide to the mix. It would be doubtful that a insecticide control application alone would be economic unless the aphid count is very high. Wheat is a remarkable crop. We will have a fair to good wheat crop this year when it is almost unbelievable the crop could withstand the April freeze. It has to the heritage of this crop in the Russian steppes as the original Turkey Red that gives the crop that ability. The Mennonite farmers who brought the crop to America have had a huge impact on our agricultural economy.

Paul C Hay, Extension Educator

University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension in Gage County • 1115 West Scott Street, Beatrice NE 68310  
(402) 223-1384 • FAX: (402) 223-1370 • email: phay1@unl.edu

