GRASSHOPPERS IN ALFALFA

Reports of high numbers of grasshoppers in alfalfa have been coming to me from a wide area. It’s time to evaluate and consider potential control options.

Grasshoppers are eating a lot of alfalfa in a lot of places. And they will only get worse as the year continues. Control may be needed.

Control begins with scouting to determine if insecticides are economically useful. Exact economic thresholds can’t be determined because of variables like value of the alfalfa and growth stage of both alfalfa and grasshopper. Still, if the grasshopper population in an established field is higher than 5 hoppers per square yard throughout the field or 15 hoppers per square yard in field margins, insecticides probably are worthwhile. Newly planted fields may need treatment if the grasshopper population is just half this level.

Around many alfalfa fields, grasshoppers have just started moving in from the field margins. Treating just the outside 150 feet or so may be sufficient in these situations. However, if the entire field already is infested, it usually is best to first harvest the alfalfa and then apply insecticide to protect the regrowth.

To reduce the cost and amount of insecticide used when treating an entire field, harvest alfalfa but leave several small, uncut strips across the field. The remaining grasshoppers will quickly congregate in these strips, enabling you to just treat these smaller areas. Reduced Area/Agent Treatments also have proven effective for alfalfa.

Carefully read and follow all label directions and be especially careful to avoid injuring bee and other important pollinating insects.

If you have many grasshoppers in your alfalfa, control them soon. As they grow larger, they’ll only get worse.