

## MONITOR ALFALFA FIELDS FOR POTATO LEAFHOPPERS



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Some fields of the second cutting alfalfa has been harvested and now 3<sup>rd</sup> cutting is starting to grow. In other fields, the first cutting has only been cut. There have been reports of potato leafhopper infestations in some areas. In the past we have had infestations of potato leafhoppers (PLH) in alfalfa fields throughout the summer. It is important to monitor your fields for potato leafhopper throughout the remainder of the summer and treat fields if population levels warrant it. If you have feeding damage on alfalfa from potato leaf hoppers, it is characterized by a wedge-shaped yellow or sometimes purple area formed on the leaf tips known as hopper burn. The leafhoppers inject a toxin into the plant as they feed and can cause severe damage to alfalfa, especially in seedling alfalfa.

Potato leafhoppers are 1/8 inch long or less, bright green, wedge-shaped insects. First year spring planted alfalfa fields and fields planted last year are particularly attractive to and vulnerable to potato leafhoppers. Older fields can also be affected. Some of the newer developed alfalfa varieties have resistance to potato leafhoppers, which protects them fairly well. Seedling alfalfa still may be damaged and all fields should be scouted as large numbers of leafhoppers may cause problems.

When is chemical control of potato leafhopper recommended? The shorter the alfalfa, the more susceptible it is to damage from the potato leafhopper. If alfalfa has been cut recently, it should be greening up and showing some regrowth. If not, you should scout for potato leafhopper. Use of a sweep net is the most reliable way to scout for potato leafhoppers. The Nemaha County Extension office has a sweep net to use for scouting insects. The sweep net is available to check out or if you are interested, I can scout your fields.

In scouting a field, population numbers are best determined by using a 15” diameter sweep net and making a series of sweeps at different locations per field. To get a representative estimate of PLH numbers, at least 25 sweeps should be taken from each of four locations in each field. The University of Nebraska has economic thresholds based on the height of alfalfa, the number of PLH per sweep of a 15” diameter net, the value of alfalfa hay and the cost of insecticide application. Current prices for good alfalfa is around \$85 per ton for big round bales. If leafhopper numbers have reached or exceeded threshold levels and an alfalfa field is more than 12” tall, immediate harvest is recommended rather than treatment with an insecticide. Harvesting will cause the adults to move out of the field and most nymphs will die due to starvation and exposure. Fields can become reinfested from other nearby fields after being treated with an insecticide or harvested, so weekly scouting through the season is recommended. Severely damaged alfalfa will need to be cut to allow recovery and regrowth to occur. If you are interested in seeing the tables of the treatment thresholds for potato leafhopper from the University of Nebraska, a previous issue of CropWatch discusses potato leafhopper. It can be accessed at: <http://cropwatch.unl.edu/potato-leafhoppers-2015>. If you have questions feel free to call Nemaha County Extension office at 1824 N St. in Auburn (402) 274-4755.

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