Most seed alfalfa fields in our area are either dry or harvested. The remaining fields, however, are harboring large populations of Lygus. These populations are dominated by nymphs, as developing adults appear to be exiting these fields in search of more favorable habitat. Cotton is squaring heavily, and growers should prepare to treat for Lygus as densities exceed threshold but no sooner.

Crop Progress & Lygus Trends
The majority of seed alfalfa fields have been dried down or harvested by this past week (Fig. 1). This reduces the potential habitat for Lygus as long as re-growth is kept to a minimum. So fewer fields are contributing to the area’s production of Lygus. Unfortunately, some unharvested fields continue to build in Lygus numbers (Fig. 2). On average, these seed alfalfa fields are harboring more Lygus than in previous weeks and more than for any other host monitored. Interestingly, adult numbers are declining in seed alfalfa. This trend could represent the dispersal of adults from these declining fields towards more suitable hosts. The challenge now is to complete all seed alfalfa production before the growing numbers of nymphs mature into dispersing adults.

Forage alfalfa continues to actively grow throughout the local community. As we move through this period of seed alfalfa decline and associated adult movement, it is important to maintain as many patches (fields, blocks, benches or strips) of actively growing and well-watered forage alfalfa at all times. These areas will serve to attract any locally dispersing Lygus to this crop which is unaffected by Lygus presence. At the same time, this will limit movement of Lygus to cotton fields.

Cotton continues to grow quickly and most fields are in early to peak bloom, a period that is very sensitive to Lygus damage. Lygus numbers remain low in cotton, and there have been no reports of sprays for Lygus so far. Timing of Lygus sprays can be critical for yield and quality protection. Furthermore, a Lygus spray may be the first insecticide application made in many fields this year. Because of this and the broad spectrum nature of our Lygus control arsenal, it is important to reserve use until absolutely necessary. This will help conserve the rather diverse and generous supply of natural enemies needed to keep Lygus and other pests in check. Lygus sprays can typically serve to release whiteflies, mites, or armyworms from stable natural controls.

Timing Lygus Sprays in Cotton
Lygus chemical controls in cotton should be used once there are at least 15 total Lygus with 4 nymphs per 100 sweeps. Sprays sooner than this or for adults only have resulted in less than maximum yields and lower economic returns in recent research (Ellsworth, 2000). Infestations will typically begin as adult-biased populations, sometimes far exceeding the ‘15’ level before nymphs are detected. The ‘15:4’ threshold requires the presence of at least 4 nymphs per 100 sweeps before spraying. Adults are not readily killed by our insecticides. Fortunately, yield protection is largely related to control of the nymphs. A large beneficial insect community may enable growers to postpone control even longer.
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References