TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION

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FORT BEND COUNTY

Agriculture Newsletter

Row Crop Update

By: John Gordy, CEA Agriculture and Natural Resources

Inside this issue:

Figure 1: Rootless corn planted around March 1st. Nodal root development is more affected moving from right to left notice the overall effect on plant growth

The 2017 cropping season is well under way with the majority of acreage planted and emerging. The rains that fell across the county on April 11th ranged from a 0.5 to 1.25" and were a welcome sight as corn and sorghum are growing fast and cotton is popping out of the ground.

Corn: Most of the early planted corn is progressing well. We did see some rootless corn syndrome or floppy corn in a few fields planted around March 1st (Figure 1). A number of factors including excessive moisture at planting, planting too shallow, as well us uncontrollable weather conditions including quickly drying topsoil with periodic rains and excessive wind can result in the lack of development of nodal roots resulting in the characteristic floppy corn. Before the storms on April 11, fields damaged this year appeared to have less than 2% damage. Since those storms, loss may have increased. Damage in fields observed in 2016 was often greater than 25% loss. As corn progresses, keep a look out for Southern Rust of Corn—we have some publications available at the office for more information.

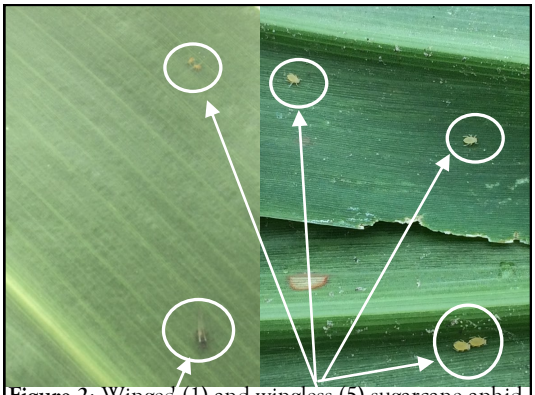

Figure 2: Winged (1) and wingless (5) sugarcane aphid found on V5-V6 sorghum in Fort Bend County

Sorghum: Grain sorghum in the county varies from emerging to V6-V7. As of April 10th and 11th, I was able to find a few sugarcane aphids (>5 per leaf) on some V5-V6 grain sorghum near the edge of two fields (Figure 2). I was not able to find any farther out. This could be due to aphids moving from johnsongrass in ditches to the crop or because the sorghum I checked was exposed to more soil moisture resulting in shorter life of seed applied insecticide. Regardless, if your sorghum has been out of the ground more than 30 days, its time to start looking for sugarcane aphid. I also found a few yellow sugarcane aphids on the lower most leaves, however they were not in numbers to cause treatment.

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Spring Management Tips for Cow Calf Producers

By: Joe C. Paschal—Livestock Specialist, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, j-paschal@tamu.edu

Spring is here and it is time to consider some management tips for the cowherd. With most of the calves on the ground, now is the time to begin planning to work this year's calves. Vaccination for Blackleg and other Clostridial diseases should be a priority. The Sudden Death diseases (including Blackleg) are the number one killer of calves and cows. In addition, castration of bull calves, implanting the steer calves, internal and external parasite control treatment, dehorning, and identifying all calves with an ear tag and a ranch or holding brand should be included.

Any heifers considered for replacements should be vaccinated for Brucellosis or Bang's disease between the ages of 4 and 12 months of age. Brucellosis causes abortion and was once a significant reproductive disease in the state. After many years of vaccination and testing, Texas is Brucellosis free, but I highly recommend continued vaccination of replacement heifers, both purebred and commercial. Your veterinarian will have to administer the brucellosis vaccine so you will have to schedule your calf working around an appointment with them.

Although I prefer knife cutting for castration, some prefer to use an elastic band to castrate calves. If you prefer to band your bull calves, I recommend a tetanus toxoid vaccination. Since the process of castration by banding takes a little longer and the wound caused by the band takes longer to heal, there is a greater risk for infection. Some of the Blackleg vaccines, especially some of the 8-way vaccines, contain tetanus. Check the label or vaccinate with a separate injection.

While planning for the calf working consider any cow work that might be done. If the calves are 3-4 months old, some early pregnancy checking could be conducted. In addition, there might be some vaccinations your veterinarian recommends and certainly horn fly control would be appreciated by your cows. It has been an early season for horn flies and a combination of both a "knock down" product like a pour-on and long term control like a fly tag should be used.

New Year – Old Pest

By: Joe C. Paschal—Livestock Specialist, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, j-paschal@tamu.edu

As we begin a new year we are faced with an old pest, the fever tick. The fever tick (actually there are two different species) once ranged as far north as Virginia and is the host for the blood parasite that causes Cattle or Tick Fever. This disease can kill as many as 90% of the affected cattle.

Beginning in 1906, the USDA Fever Tick Eradication Program eliminated fever ticks down to a 500 mile stretch of Texas along the Rio Grande. This line runs from Del Rio to the Gulf of Mexico and is known as the Permanent Quarantine Zone. Inside the Zone, actually a buffer between the US and Mexico (which has both the ticks and the disease), fever ticks are often found since the river is not a perfect barrier. Wildlife and stray cattle from Mexico can bring ticks across. Tick riders patrol this Zone on horseback to look for cattle with ticks.

Outside the Zone, the fever tick is not usually found unless it is carried by wildlife or in a special case, by an exotic antelope, the Nilgai. Cattle and other livestock inside the Zone must be treated for ticks with an insecticide and inspected before leaving.

Recently fever ticks (but not the disease) were found in Live Oak County requiring a Temporary Quarantine Zone to be established by the Texas Animal Health Commission, the state regulatory agency responsible for animal health. TAHC is inspecting and treating affected herds to reduce the economic impact on producers. Cattle producers have their choice of two treatment options or their pastures can be vacated for 6-9 months to starve the tick.

Timing for Pasture Weed Control is Critical

By: Vanessa Corriher-Olson—Forage Extension Specialist, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, vacorriher@ag.tamu.edu

Our human nature is to find a simple, one time solution for our problems. Unfortunately, this simple, one time solution does not exist for weed control in pastures and hay meadows. There are several factors that are important when it comes to weed control. These include:

Weed Identification: We cannot make the best management decisions if we don't even know what the plant is we are trying to eradicate. Identification will determine the timing of our herbicide application along with the herbicide we choose. There are a multitude of resources available to help with identification. County extension agents, extension specialist, websites (such as: https://nobleapps.noble.org/plantimagegallery/, http://rangeplants.tamu.edu/), books, etc. Identification is important since some herbicides are more effective on certain weed species than others. Correct identification of the target plant helps ensure the selection of the most effective herbicide as well as most effective time of application.

Sprayer Calibration: Sprayer calibration is a critical step for a pesticide applicator in making sure the correct amount of pesticide is applied to the target site. Calibration is the process by which the amount of pesticide being applied per unit of area is determined. This step is most often skipped because we get in a hurry, we calibrated it once a long time ago (surely nothing has changed) or we forget. By skipping sprayer calibration, the applicator may be applying too much pesticide or not enough pesticide. If too little pesticide is applied, the pest may not be controlled. Using more product than label directions recommend is illegal, may not control the pest effectively, may injure non-targets and may be hazardous to the environment. For a step-by-step guide to calibrating a sprayer see the following publication: Sprayer Calibration.

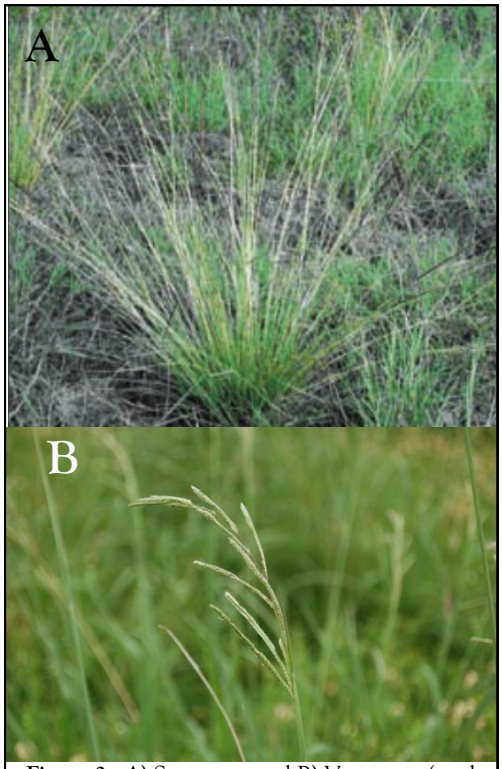

Figure 3: A) Smutgrass and B) Vaseygrass (seed head), two common difficult to control pasture weeds in Fort Bend County

Timing of Application: Once we have identified the weed we can determine if the plant is an annual, biennial or a perennial. Growth pattern will influence our timing to maximize control as well as reduce future populations. Annual plants, like wooly croton, complete their life cycle in one year/season. Ideal time to spray annual weeds with herbicide is when they are small and growing, well before they produce any flower or seed. Perennials complete their life cycle in multiple years/seasons. They often reproduce by seed and can regrow from root structures. An example of a perennial is blackberry/dewberry. Most perennials need to be sprayed with a herbicide at blooming or shortly thereafter. Identification will help determine the best time to be the most effective with given herbicides.

Follow the Label Directions: Strict adherence to label directions is required by law. Paying close attention to label directions will also ensure safe, effective, and economical use. Herbicide labels contain directions for proper rate and timing of application, a list of susceptible species, and information regarding cleanup and disposal following use.

Remember: The label is the law. Always read the pesticide label before using.

Huisache Management

From: Huisache Ecology and Management

http://southtexasrangelands.tamu.edu/files/2014/05/Huisache-Ecology-Management.pdf

By: Megan K. Clayton, Robert K. Lyons, and Joshua A. McGinty

Huisache (pronounced WE-satch) is a tough, invasive tree that is native to Texas rangelands including Fort Bend County. It grows well on deep, poorly drained soils and can quickly dominate a landscape where the soil has been disturbed. Because huisache easily crowds out other plants, it creates problems for landowners who want to produce forage for livestock or maintain a variety of plants for wildlife.

Figure 4: A) Huisache tree growing in a pasture, B) Huisache leaves

Characteristics: Huisache thrives on acid sands, sandy loams, and clays. It has spread across Texas because of overgrazing by livestock, the spread of seeds by livestock and wildlife, and the reduction of fires previously caused by lightning or set by humans. Areas that have been disturbed greatly, such as plowed fields, are prime sites for huisache germination. In optimum conditions, 70 percent of huisache seeds germinate, usually within 24 hours. Huisache seeds must be scarified in order to germinate. This typically happens through natural weathering or as the seeds pass through an animal's digestive tract whole. More seedlings will emerge on sites that are sunny and mowed often. Huisache seeds need significant amounts of moisture to germinate and do best when temperatures are in the high 80s. Another problem is that huisache can quickly sprout back up after the portion of the plant above the soil surface is killed or removed. It resprouts from many buds on the stems and in the bud zone underground .

Prevention: To keep huisache from invading a pasture, maintain healthy stands of grass. Because huisache grows best on sites where the soil is exposed or has been disturbed, manage grazing to promote grass cover, which will also help rain filter into the ground and stabilize the soil.

Management: Choose the treatment method that is best for the number and size of huisache on your property:

- For areas with more than 400 plants per acre, broadcast treatments take less time and money per tree.

- For areas with fewer than 400 plants per acre and for plants that are less than 6 feet tall, the best control method is individual plant treatment (IPT).

Both chemical and mechanical control methods have broadcast and IPT options. For instance, broadcast methods include mowing, plowing, or spraying herbicide from an airplane, or tractor. IPT methods include grubbing, the cut-stump method, or spraying herbicide on plant leaves or stems using backpack/hand sprayers or ATVs or other vehicles. See Chemical Weed and Brush Control Suggestions for Rangelands for herbicide control methods or pestman.tamu.edu for mechanical and chemical control options.

Herbicide control considerations: The goal when applying herbicide to control huisache is to ultimately have the chemical reach the bud zone, killing the plant. This can be accomplished by three methods, all of which have been tested for maximum effectiveness and personal and environmental safety:

- Leaf spray method: The leaf spray method takes advantage of the plant's natural process of storing carbohydrates in the roots. If you cover the leaves with herbicide, the plant will move it to the bud zone, where it will kill the tree. Timing is critical for this method. Spray in the fall when the leaves are mature and the plant is transporting carbohydrates from the leaves to the roots. Leaf sprays are less effective while the tree is growing new (light green) leaves. At that time, the tree is using the carbohydrates for the new growth, not moving them to the roots. Huisache trees need enough leaf area to take the chemical down to the root. For the leaf spray method to work best on regrowth huisache, the plant should be at least 3 feet tall and have healthy leaves. Also, the herbicide will be more effective if you spray when the soil is moist or rain has fallen recently (Fig. 5).

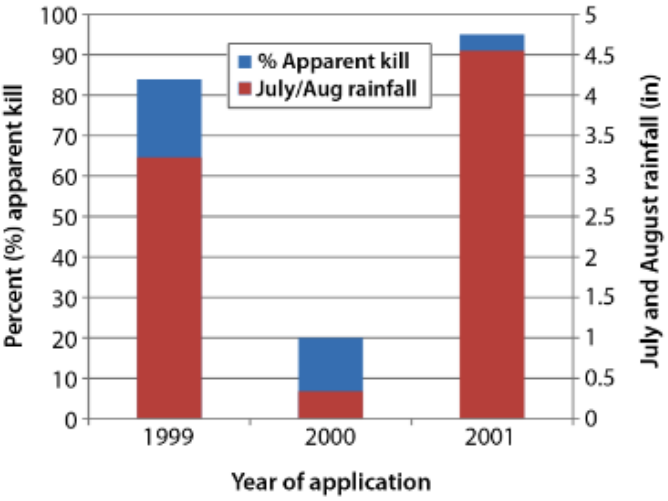

Figure 5: Huisache control results from Kinney County, TX, using the individual plant treatment leaf-spray method compared to the amount of rainfall in July and August 1999–2001. Applications were made in September each year using Grazon P+D®, the current chemical standard.

To use the leaf spray method:

1. Mix the chemical in water (for instructions, see Chemical Weed and Brush Control Suggestions for Rangelands). Always add a non-ionic surfactant, crop oil, or methylated seed oil at a 0.25 to 0.5 percent rate (32 to 64 ounces per 100 gallons of water).

2. For IPT treatments, add 0.25 to 0.5 percent blue dye; spray it on the leaves using a backpack or garden pump-up sprayer or a UTV or tractor with a spray wand fitted with a 5500-X8 adjustable cone nozzle.

3. Cover all the leaves on the plant until they are wet but not dripping. The herbicide must remain on the leaves for 1 full hour to reach maximum rain fastness.

4. With current chemistries, the tree must be left intact for at least one growing season before removing the top growth to allow the chemical to reach the entire bud zone.

- Stem spray method: The stem spray method works best on stems that are less than 4 inches in diameter. These stems have smooth bark, which absorbs the chemical more easily. Do not use this method on plants with more than three stems. Those trees will need more mixture, which increases the cost. Also, the herbicide is less likely to move uniformly into the bud zone, and the tree will be able to resprout. Although you can use the stem spray method any time of year, it works best during the growing season.

To use the stem spray method:

1. Mix 25 percent triclopyr ester and 75 percent diesel fuel oil.

2. Use a backpack or garden pump-up sprayer with a wand. A 5500-X1 adjustable cone nozzle will apply the mixture to the stem effectively and efficiently.

Huisache Management, continued from page 5

3. Cover each stem all the way around the trunk from 12 to 15 inches high all the way to the soil surface. You will not need to add so much mixture that it pools up at the base of the trunk.

4. Leave the tree intact for at least one growing season before removing the top growth to allow the chemical to reach the entire bud zone.

For more information on the stem or leaf spray method, see Brush Busters: How to Control Huisache and Chemical Weed and Brush Control Suggestions for Rangelands. These publications are available at the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Bookstore at www.agrilifebookstore.org.

Cut-stump method: Although the cut-stump method works well for trees of any stem size, it requires less labor and works best on trees that have three stems or less. The cutstump method is almost 100 percent effective if done correctly:

1. Make a flat cut directly through the trunk as low to the ground as possible without getting soil on the cut surface. Use pruning shears, a chain saw, a brush cutter/saw, or a skid-steer with a wheel saw or a shear attachment.

2. Remove all dirt and debris from the cut surface to allow the chemical to absorb.

3. Mix 15 percent triclopyr ester and 85 percent diesel fuel oil.

4. Add 0.25 to 0.5 percent blue dye to help you ensure that the stump is sprayed completely.

5. Spray the mixture on the entire cut surface and the remaining part of the stem(s) immediately after cutting. For more information on this method, see How to Avoid Lumps When Treating Cut Stumps, available from the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Bookstore.

Mechanical control considerations: Many tools have been used throughout the years to try to control huisache. Most have undesirable side effects. An efficient individual plant treatment method for removing huisache trees is grubbing. This method removes the plant below the first lateral root, which will be 5 to 20 inches underground, depending on the age of the tree. Two common practices that worsen huisache problems are mowing and root plowing. Land managers commonly mow huisache with shredders or roller-choppers. But the huisache quickly regrows many stems from a single plant. This practice may also encourage more seedlings because more sunlight will reach bare ground. With enough rain, the huisache can regrow to half its previous height within 5 months of top removal. If you remove the top repeatedly—either by mowing or by other failed attempts at control—you will end up with many huisache that are small above ground but have huge root systems. Top removal encourages huisache dominance on the site.

General management considerations: Leaving a few huisache on your property can provide limited benefit to wildlife as long as you manage the property to maintain a diversity of plants. The amount of huisache should reflect your long-term management goals. In general, keep huisache canopy coverage to less than 30 percent of the property to allow the growth of nonwoody plants (forbs and grasses) for wildlife and livestock. Younger huisache plants are easier to control. Management techniques that only kill or remove the aboveground part of the plant—such as mowing, prescribed fire, shredding, or roller chopping—will create a multistem plant and leave a growth form that is more difficult to control. To discourage huisache seedlings from becoming established, manage livestock grazing to leave enough grass stubble for maximum soil coverage. No matter which method you choose for controlling huisache, you'll need to make follow-up treatments.

Row Crop Update, continued from page 1

Sorghum, continued: Transform did receive approval on sorghum for use against sugarcane aphid in 2017. The label is the same as it was in 2016. This insecticide is a go-to for sugarcane aphid as it is providing good control (at 1 oz/a) of sugarcane aphid when used as directed by the label. If you need to review the label (keeping in mind restrictions for use near and during flowering) go to texasagriculture.gov and search for section 18 labels. Sivanto is also available and the 4 oz/a rate is providing good control against this aphid in the coastal bend. Current environmental conditions are favorable for additional sugarcane aphid migration and optimal for its reproduction. The best way to handle any crop pest is routine scouting, utilizing thresholds (average of 50 to 125 aphids per leaf for our area) and spraying once thresholds are reached (highly suggested to do so within 3 days after the population reaches the threshold), and use enough carrier (minimum of 10/gallons per acre by ground or 5 gallons per acre by air) to penetrate the canopy and maximize coverage on lower leaves.

Cotton: Most cotton is stilll very small (<4 true leaves) or is just coming up. With good growing conditions and an insecticide seed treatment, we should be ok until it starts squaring. That being said, if it turns off cloudy and cool, keep an eye out for thrips damage. Additionally, they have been seeing quite a few aphids in cotton farther south. Aphids typically do not result in yield loss when colonizing in the seedling and early growth stages, and are usually controlled by beneficials or fungus. Once cotton starts squaring, its important to scout for fleahoppers and to protect those primary fruiting positions. If you are using a sweep net, the threshold range is 10 to 25 per 100 sweeps or 15 per 100 plants if checking individual plant terminals.

Soybeans: Most soybeans are just pushing out of the ground or being planted. Make sure to look for cutworms and thrips early. Most other major pests will be more obvious once beans begin to set flowers and fill pods. We do have soybean management guides at the office if you would like to stop by and pick one up.

2017 Acreage Reporting Dates

In order to comply with FSA program eligibility requirements, all producers are encouraged to visit their local FSA office to file an accurate crop certification report by the applicable deadline.

The deadline for Acreage Certification in Fort Bend County is July 15th. Please do not wait until the last minute.

The following exceptions apply to acreage reporting dates:

- If the crop has not been planted by the applicable acreage reporting date, then the acreage must be reported no later than 15 calendar days after planting is completed
- If a producer acquires additional acreage after the applicable acreage reporting date, the acreage must be reported no later than 30 calendar days after purchase or acquiring the lease; Appropriate documentation must be provided to the county office
- If a perennial forage crop is reported with the intended use of “cover only,” “green manure,” “left standing,” or “seed,” then the acreage must be reported by July 15

Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) policy holders should note that the acreage reporting date for NAP covered crops is the earlier of the applicable dates or 15 calendar days before grazing or harvesting of the crop begins.

For questions regarding crop certification and crop loss reports, please contact Fort Bend County office of the Farm Service Agency at (281) 232-6898 extension 2.

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DATES TO REMEMBER

May 5
Pond Management Workshop

May 17 (Tentative)
Small Acreage Pasture Management Program

May 25 (rescheduled from May 19)
Private Applicator Training

USDA RMA Final Planting Dates
Corn and Grain Sorghum –April 15th
Cotton –May 15th
Rice –May 31st
Soybeans –June 25th

June 22
Row Crops Tour–Fort Bend, Brazoria, and Waller Counties