

Crop Report:

Where is the crop heading? It has good potential but doesn't look like a record breaker. That was the sentiment we picked up last week while traveling in the valley from Kern County to Merced County. Our stops included the Kings-Tulare, Fresno and Madera-Merced county meetings.

Retention varies widely, which is true to some extent every season. Taken as a whole, though, the general retention average appears lower than recent seasons at this same point.

Ron Oliver with BASF has seen a number of stands with 80-85% retention but 60-70% "is probably more typical," he estimates. "A lot of acreage also is under 50%."

Overall, he says, retention appears to be "a little lower than in past seasons, and vegetative growth is a little larger." PCAs report similar retention trends.

Lygus are cited as the probable reason for lower retention in many fields, though counts have often remained at sub-threshold levels. A majority of dissected dropped squares in Kern County show insect damage, says Pete Goodell, Extension IPM entomologist.

Physiological factors also may be at play, though Goodell and cotton specialist Bob Hutmacher say losses can't be easily linked to fertility or weather.

It may be a difficult season to classify from a physiological perspective. Quick heat unit accumulation in May made for a fast start. Depending on the location, the season is 3-15 days ahead of the norm, based on degree day totals.

Accumulations continue to run above normal, though the gap has closed some in the last two weeks between 1997 and the 30-year average (see chart, next page). Windy, drying conditions also stressed some stands.

PCAs and Extension workers note that fruiting in some cases started lower in the plant than they normally expect. Two PCAs mentioned finding plants with fruiting well underway on the fourth branch on a consistent basis across a couple of fields. Dan Munk, Extension farm advisor in Fresno County, reports finding a Pima field with a fully closed canopy and some fruiting on third branches.

Mite Report:

At one meeting last week, Beth Grafton-Cardwell, Kearney Agricultural Center entomologist, reported that populations are so low that she has made very few resistance bioassays on mites this year. PCAs and Extension workers also are finding minimal mite numbers:

John Moore, independent PCA, Bakersfield: "Mites probably are at as low a level as I have seen in 10 years. They're unbelievably low. We started seeing a little more aphid during the week. In fields that have not been sprayed yet for lygus but have aphids now, we will apply Provado and Zephyr. We have to take a stab now at deciding in some cases whether to do a cleanup spray or nothing at all. I feel uncomfortable about going into layby without a miticide."

Vern Crawford, Wilbur-Ellis Co., Shafter: "This is the best shape we've been in with mites in four years. Everybody has been conscientious about managing mites before they get out of hand. We used Zephyr early and probably have the best level of beneficials we've seen in a long time."

Dan Buchak, PCA, Gillespie Ag Service, Porterville: "Mites are under control. A few growers haven't laid by yet and we will go in with Zephyr or Comite, depending on the grower's call. We're watching for aphids and lygus right now and prescribing tankmixes as needed, then layby with Temik."

Nick Soares, Wilbur-Ellis Co., Selma: "Mite pressure is light. We're just about finished with cleanup sprays."

Cindy A. Harris, agronomist, J.G. Boswell Co., Corcoran: "Mites are very light. I mainly work with Pima, and it hasn't needed a miticide treatment."

Pete Goodell, Extension IPM entomologist: "Mites are light right now in all row crops, not just in cotton."

Bill Weir, Extension farm advisor, Merced County: "We're continuing to see mite populations and the number of infested leaves decline in untreated check plots in our miticide comparison tests."

Insect Summary:

Aphids: Dark morphs were reported in Kern County. Treatments were being made last week in Kern, Kings and Tulare Counties. Nick Soares, Wilbur-Ellis Co. in Selma, has treated aphids on 20% of his cotton with Lorsban. PCAs say aphids still are turning up mostly in spots. James Brazzle, Extension entomology advisor in Kern County, recommends flagging hot areas and rechecking every few days to determine if beneficials are having any effect.

Whitefly: Treatments with IGRs were made in Kern County last week and more are expected early this week. The activity is reported south of Bakersfield. An IGR treatment also was made on a problem field near citrus in eastern Tulare County.

Lygus: Treatments continue on a wider basis. The insect remains a concern but not everywhere. In the Fresno County meeting in San Joaquin Thursday, Extension workers asked for a show of hands about the severity of lygus pressure. A small number of PCAs and growers indicated they were encountering light to moderate pressure, but nobody raised a hand when asked if they faced severe pressure.

Steve Wright, Extension farm advisor in Tulare County, says lygus have "slam dunked" some fields he's seen, leaving them with zero retention. "In some fields, we've watched lygus counts jump from zero to 10-15 pretty quickly," says Wright.

Pete Goodell continues recommending twice-weekly scouting and use of "softer" materials if possible. But Goodell also advises shifting to pyrethroids when pressure is intense and prolonged migration makes residual activity a necessity.

One Vydate formulation also is available now for lygus treatment, a DuPont representative noted at the Fresno County meeting. Crop Conditions: