

Crop Conditions:

The crop continues to progress, and predicted highs in the 90s will spur growth and pest activity, PCAs and Extension workers say. A few early fields are receiving first irrigation, but most acreage isn't ready.

Pest pressure is becoming more apparent. Mite treatments started on a spot basis through much of the valley last week, and more treatments are expected this week.

Mite Report:

The following reports were gathered Friday and Saturday, May 9-10.

Steve Wright, Extension farm advisor, Tulare County: "We're seeing spider mite populations picking up, and some fields are being treated now with Zephyr or Kelthane. Fields being treated range all the way in development from first true leaves to four true leaves. Treatments mostly are consistent with fields that did not receive systemics, but we're beginning to see systemic control breaking in earlier planted stands. I think will see more treatments in the next week. So far in our area, it looks like it's going to be a bad year for spider mites."

John Tatum, PCA, Buttonwillow Warehouse, Buttonwillow: "Spraying has started in a few places, and I was in fields today where populations are beginning to develop but aren't critical yet. We will see more spraying in the next week as a precaution."

John Usher, PCA and manager, Western Farm Service, Hanford: "About 25% of our cotton was planted on time, and some of it is up to 7 inches high. At-planting insecticides are wearing off, and light to medium mite activity is developing. Some spraying has started."

Chris Morgner, PCA, Agri-Valley Consulting, Merced: "On some early plantings that did not receive Temik we've seen increases in mites, but we're only treating 75 to 100 acres for mites right now. Those places are along dusty roads or near harvested sugar beets or alfalfa."

James Brazzle, Extension entomology advisor, Kern County: "We have had some spray rigs in the field for spider mites since at least Tuesday (May 6). The warming trend will continue, so people need to keep a close eye on populations. Right now, there aren't any hotspots, just scattered areas with 20-25% infestations."

Dan Buchak, PCA, Gillespie Ag Service, Porterville: "Most of my people used Temik at planting, and mite control looks excellent. I'm treating one field today (Friday) that did not have Temik. In another case, we've got fields separated by a narrow road that really show a visible difference between stands treated and not treated with a systemic."

Bill Weir, Extension farm advisor, Merced County: "Farmers are spraying in this area for mites. Some places have 100% infested leaves downwind from hay, and we're seeing 50-60% infestations, too. Where we're finding mites, we also see eggs."

Mike Molatore, PCA, Western Farm Service, Mettler: "I've already started spraying. Mites began developing early in some of my growers' fields, and we've probably sprayed 5% of the acreage as of today (Friday). By the end of next week, we will be spraying the

balance. I've learned not to try to delay the first treatment until after first irrigation, whether mites are at threshold or just in small numbers. We're dealing at this point with young cotton and want to spray early on the bottom positions where the money is. I'm already seeing pinhead positions."

Nick Groenenberg, independent PCA, Hanford: "We're starting to see mites a little more. They're at normal levels, considering conditions, and justify treatments in a few fields next week before first irrigation."

Doug Hudson, PCA, Wilbur-Ellis Co., San Joaquin: "We started seeing cotton aphids in some fields 10 days ago and will spray them early next week. We're seeing some mites, too, and will add Kelthane. The predators just haven't been strong. Mite pressure is earlier this year. We usually don't expect to see this activity before the first two weeks of June."

Treatment Challenges

Gaining good coverage with miticides will be a challenge in the next two weeks, say PCAs and Extension personnel. Mites are turning up in high enough numbers to force treatments on small plants, and it may be difficult in some cases to reach leaf undersides.

"It's going to be important to avoid putting that seed line in a little valley with cultivation," says James Brazzle, Extension entomology advisor in Kern County. "We're seeing treatments on 4-5" cotton. Putting up a barrier along that seed line means we'll be spraying dirt instead of hitting under leaves and gaining good coverage on cotyledons where the infestation is focused."

Dan Buchak, PCA with Gillespie Ag Service in Porterville, has been dealing with some small cotton where mites are gathering numbers, and he hopes "to skate by another week" to allow for more growth and better possible coverage.

"If we spray now, we'll be dragging nozzles in the dirt," Buchak says.

Insect Summary:

Aphids: Treatments being made on a very spotty basis. Doug Hudson, PCA with Wilbur-Ellis Co. in San Joaquin, expect to spray aphids this week. PCAs in Fresno County report aphids, but beneficial counts remain high, says Dan Munk, Extension advisor.

Beneficial insects: Ladybugs continue to be the predominate ally, but numbers aren't universally high. Manuel Jimenez, Extension research associate, says ladybug counts have crashed in many cases when pest populations failed to develop quickly enough to maintain feeding.

Armyworms: Reported in Tulare and Kings Counties but not at treatable levels.