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SoyFax: Midsouth

May 16, 2001

Saltmarsh caterpillars have been mentioned over the last two weeks in *SoyFax* and our cotton and rice reports. As we were wrapping up this issue, our colleague Bill Barksdale sent an e-mail regarding saltmarsh caterpillar infestations he was seeing in Tunica County, Miss., cotton fields this morning.

Barksdale, owner of Barksdale Agri-Communications in Memphis, reports seeing "entire stands (of cotton) destroyed in extreme cases. I'm talking 50 acres or more. Some other fields have spots with no stand."

Pyrethroids appear to be having "little effect," based on what Barksdale saw and comments made to him by growers and consultants. Some fields had been sprayed twice. One grower gained acceptable control with a tankmix of Karate for cutworms plus Curacron, he adds.

"The saltmarsh is worse than I can recall ever seeing, but on a spotty basis," Barksdale tells us. "In

one case today, I saw a field that was totally devastated, but on the other side of the paved road cotton appeared to be in good shape."

Crop Reports:

Lanny Ashlock, Arkansas Extension Soybean Specialist: "Rains last Friday helped a lot where they fell but the showers were very localized and a good many people were left out. Armyworms have been heavy in wheat and moved into the corn and rice but haven't been a problem in beans. We're about 55% planted now. Some people are having to shut down planting due to lack of rainfall. And there are some beans that got socked in pretty deep to find moisture. We've got cases, too, of people trying to water up beans. There's quite a bit of grasshopper pressure. They're small right now, in the nymph stage. People are watching them, and if it stays dry like this we could have a problem. Northeast Arkansas is really struggling in terms of moisture, and some prewatering is underway and

people are watering up on beds. I hate to see things start like this in May, but we don't have a choice. About the only part of the state that received a lot of rain was in the southwestern corner in the Red River bottoms."

Grady Coburn, Consultant, Pest Management Enterprises, Cheneyville, La.: "What few soybeans that are being grown around here this season tend to be in rotation with sugarcane. We had an awful lot of cane plowed up this year for various reasons. Some growers got caught off guard by a harder winter than was expected, and they've been planting on a triple drill 15" to 18" apart on the cane rows. Those planting MG Vs and VIs are still planting. With the moisture we have, they're still in pretty good shape to plant. We aren't finding insect pressure in beans."

Walter Morrison, Louisiana Extension Soybean Specialist: "We're waiting for rain to finish planting. A lot of spraying is going on, mainly on Roundup Ready

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beans. We have a few thrips in beans but I don't think anyone is spraying them. Other than the fact that a lot of our fields are grassy right now, they aren't stressed. But we're at the point that if anyone hasn't planted yet they're going to have to wait for a rain. And if they've worked their ground up, it's going to have to be a pretty good one as dry as things have been. Rains we've had for the last month have been spotty."

Gus Lorenz, Arkansas Extension IPM Specialist: "Some treatments have gone out for grasshoppers. To my knowledge, saltmarsh caterpillars haven't been working on soybeans in Arkansas yet. We've got some bad chinchbugs in some later planted corn, mostly around White and Woodruff Counties."

Steve Schutz, Ind. Consultant, Coushatta, La.: "Some growers are still going full speed with soybean planting, though we've also got folks waiting for a rain before they do any more. We've been nearly a month without significant area-wide rainfall. The beans that are up look good. So far, we haven't had insect pressure in soybeans. A few wheat farmers are starting to combine, and corn is at 12 true leaves with maybe two more coming out."

Kermit Kuethe, Agro Distributors, Jones, La.: "We treated saltmarsh caterpillars in one field last week. Parts of our area got up to .6" of rain last Thursday but we need good, widespread showers."

Craig Massey, Area IPM Specialist, Brownsville, Tenn.: "We have thrips real heavy on some soybeans. They're mainly tobacco thrips. They don't appear to be doing any damage. Immature grasshoppers are jumping out now around rows, so we don't want to clip that grass and force them into soybeans. But there's enough of a population right now to make me

believe we'll have to treat them at some point."

Alan Blaine, Miss. Extension Soybean Specialist: "Saltmarsh caterpillars appear to be sporadic. They've shown up in fields, and they severely damaged one 300-acre field in Sharkey County. The dealer rep who called about it said they were pretty big, though, and they decided to let them cycle through. Rains continue to be spotty and personalized. We're setting up for irrigation on verification fields and have already turned on pivots on a few fields. Some areas haven't had a rain in over 30 days. We've had scattered insect problems. We sprayed one verification field for beanleaf beetles. It was one of the first in the area planted and became a trap crop. This decision wasn't based on thresholds but on some experience we've had. These beetles carry viruses, and if they come in early they also tend to build through the season to the point that you've got to spray, anyway. We decided to control this generation so we wouldn't have to deal with them later. We haven't sprayed any verification fields for grasshoppers but are putting tests in a cooperator's field. We're finding very small grasshoppers, and they should be easier to kill. The plots are comparing a lower rate of Orthene, which is our standard, to pyrethroids and various rates of Dimilin. The critical thing with grasshopper control continues to be water volume. Ten gpa is the minimum but we prefer 15 gpa. Again, we're looking at the idea of hitting this first generation to reduce potential problems later. Several growers told us after 2000 that they kept watching grasshoppers in beans through a long part of the season then finally decided to spray. They wish they had sprayed earlier. We continue to see the need for early

burndown. Nearly every problem we've seen this spring was in no-till or minimum-till fields. It always seems that burndown was made too close to planting."

Chuck Farr, Mid-South Ag Consultants, Crawfordsville, Ark.: "Most soybean acreage has been planted, and the bulk of the crop is up. We've got a lot more conventional soybeans this year than Roundup Ready varieties, it appears. Programs offered by a couple of chemical companies have given growers a reason to take a look again at some of the higher yielding conventional varieties."

Mike McCain, Manager, Agro Distributors, Shelby, Miss.: "Beans are looking good where growers planted early. Between 85% and 90% were planted before May 1. We're dry with just scattered showers in some areas. Two farmers called over the weekend to get rice for another 500 acres they originally planned to put in soybeans. They didn't have soil moisture and decided to go with rice because it would be easier to water up under the circumstances."

David Guethle, County Extension Agent/Rice, Dexter, Mo.: "It's been dry, and guys aren't planting beans due to lack of moisture. Between 30% and 40% of our singlecrop beans are planted now, and a lot of those have to be replanted because there hasn't been enough moisture to bring them up. Normally, all our singlecrop beans -- about 70% of our crop -- are planted by May 15. Even the corn has stalled out due to lack of moisture. Some corn is being irrigated."