

Weekly Article

8-30-2021

What is Eating My Grass?

Hello, my Name is Richard Purdin with OSU Extension, Ag and Natural Resource Educator and Community Development Educator for Adams County. I hope to better inform local producers and the public of the latest news in the world of agriculture. September is here and that means fall is just around the corner. For hay producers this is welcome feeling of the busy hay season slowing down and for the crop producers this brings on an anxious feeling of the upcoming harvest. As the days get shorter and the nights get longer, row crop growth are slowing down and maturing. On the flip side cool season forages and perennial pastures are breaking summer dormancy and starting to grow. This is a very important time of year for forages to grow and put energy reserves in the root system, better preparing the plant for winter. Proper management steps this time of year can make a healthier and stronger crop next spring. But as always there is always a bump in the road or mother nature can throw a surprise at producers. This year is one of those years that unexpected is an understatement. I have received many calls about hay fields and pastures turning brown what seems like overnight. After conducting my field visits and scouting, the cause of defoliation and dying off forages is caused by the fall armyworm. Today I want to discuss what exactly the fall armyworm is, how to scout for it, and steps to control or suppress.

What is the Fall Armyworm- Fall Armyworm is native to tropical regions such as South America but can overwinter very well in the southern half of the United States. Fall Armyworm begins its life with the adult moth laying her eggs on host plants such as grass borders along the field, fence post, road signs, trees and many more. The eggs are dome shaped grey/ brown in color and covered with furry white covering resembling mold or hair. Eggs will hatch in about 3-4 days during the summer and young larvae will appear they are greenish in color with black heads. As the larvae (worm) grows the head will begin to turn orange and form lateral white stripes and mottled spots will develop on the dorsal. A key identifier is the development of a yellow to white Y shape on the face of the worm. The next stage is the pupa stage which is when the larvae burrows into the soil and forms a cocoon made of soil and plant residues. The larvae will then turn into an adult moth, grey and brown in color with white spots on the tips and center of the wings. Adult moths are nocturnal and are most active in warm, humid weather. The life cycle of an adult moth is 7-21 days. Southern states can see three generations in one year but farther north only see two.

How did it get here? – Fall Armyworm does not like cold weather, so they do not overwinter in Ohio. Moths move from the south with weather fronts.

What do they like to eat? – The better question is what don't they like to eat! They prefer forage grass and legumes, but they will eat row crops, cereal grain crops, vegetable crops, flowers, and turf.

Scout early and often. - As Fall Armyworms march across the field they will consume all the plant and move on to the next plant, this is how they have received their name. As the worms get larger, control get much more challenging to achieve. Scouting edges of the field in early summer for egg mass can help you get ready for a potential infestation in the fall.

How do I kill them? – When infestations are in progress and damage is extensive or 2-3 worms per sq ft is noticed, insecticide treatments are warranted. Be aware of pre harvest intervals. Many insecticides have wait times of 21 day or longer for the next harvest. Insecticides should be applied when worms are $\frac{3}{4}$ inch long for best control. Go to <https://aginsects.osu.edu/sites/aginsects/files/imce/MSU%20-%20OSU%20Insect%20IPM%20Guide.pdf> for a list of insecticides that can be used.

Some other details to go over.

- September 10th Precision Application field day located at the Ohio Valley Career and Technical Center, 175 Lloyd Road West Union, Ohio 45693. Start time is 9:30 am and end time is 12:00pm. The cost is **FREE** and lunch will be provided. Contact Richard Purdin at (937) 544 2339 or email at purdin.19@osu.edu to register by September 6th. The field day will feature flying on cover crops and fungicide on standing crops with a drone. There will be speakers present to talk about the benefits of cover crops and proper grazing and foraging cover crops.
- September 14th, 2021, Adams County BQA/ Cattle Handling workshop will be held at the Adams County fairgrounds (Show Arena) 5:30 to 8:00pm. Contact the Adams County Extension office at (937) 544-2339 to RSVP.
- Farm Science Review tickets are available at the office, the event will be September 21-23 in person!

From the field

- Corn Maturing rapidly milk line is about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the kernel.
- Armyworm devouring late cut alfalfa and pastures.
- Soybeans maturing and extensive foliar feeding from grasshoppers along the edge of the fields.