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Washington County Ag Report May 24, 2005

Contributors are Sandy Buxton, Aaron Gabriel, and Laura McDermott. Thanks to Connie Havens for compilation and formatting.

Quote

“Do not let the good things of life rob you of the best things.” -- Malthie D. Babcock

Announcements

PESTICIDE RECERTIFICATION CREDITS are available in two ways. 1) Come to my scheduled field scouting visit announced each week in this “Ag Report” and scout with me for one hour. 2) Invite me to your farm anytime, and scout your own fields with me for one hour.

FIELD CROP SCOUTING -Come earn a pesticide recertification credit by scouting with me for one hour:

Tuesday, May 31, 10 a.m. at Woody Hill Farm, Rte 22, Salem.

Grass biomass website available (Jerry Cherney, Cornell): www.GrassBioenergy.org

Weather Data – 2005 and average of 1999 - 2004

	Argyle		Easton		Whitehall		Jackson	
	2005	Average '99 – '04	2005	Average '99 – '04	2005	Average '99 – '04	2005	Average '03 – '04
Rain Past Week	0.40	1.08	0.35	0.83	0.24	0.62	0.80	1.35
So far this month	0.79	3.22	1.10	2.77	1.34	2.59	1.74	3.38
Total since April 1 st	5.27	5.02	5.02	5.00	5.71	5.51	5.96	4.20
GDD Base 41 Growing Degree Days = [hi temp + low temp]/2 – 41								
Past Week	84	111	80	118	109	129	93	140
Since April 1 st	437	524	498	589	684	657	481	591
GDD 86/50 [hi temp + low temp]/2 - 50 High's >86°F are set to 86°F, low's <50°F are set to 50°F								
Past Week	56	71	56	78	60	83	60	94
Since April 1 st	316	362	382	426	426	439	383	435

SOIL TEMPERATURE: Monday (5/23), at 4 pm it was 62 °F (after a daytime high of 62 °F). Today at 9 am it was 52 °F in a no-till corn field (spring-killed sod); 51 °F across the road in a spring-plowed sod planted to corn; and 54 °F down the same road in a new seeding of alfalfa. (The air temperature the night before was about 44 °F.)

Midwest Commodity Prices - from the Wall Street Journal

Corn per bushel	\$2.03/bu	Cotton Seed Meal per ton	\$110/ton
Soybean per bushel	6.33/bu	Corn Gluten Feed	52/ton
Hominy Feed per ton	41/ton	Wheat, soft white	3.93/bu
48% Soybean meal per ton	198/ton	Tallow per pound	.20/lb

These prices are provided only to show where the general market trends are moving and to help you determine appropriate ration ingredients. Local prices will vary due to shipping, processing, and discounts.

TRADING POST

FOR SALE: Antique Produce Wagon, fully functional, beautiful condition. Call 499-2965.

LAND OWNERS: Timber may represent a large investment and income potential for you. **Educate yourself before selling trees for timber.** There are good ways and bad ways to sell your trees. A short video entitled, "Managing the Equity in Your Wood Lot" is a must see to begin planning a timber sale. It is available from the SWCD, 692-9940 ext.3. We also have a packet of information and resources here at our office. The bottom line is this: do not have a logger mark, cut and sell the trees all by him/herself. Have a professional forester mark the appropriate trees for harvest. Get bids on what will be paid for the marked trees. Then have a written contract with a logger to harvest the trees for sale. AG

LIVESTOCK PEST MANAGEMENT: The weather is cool (very cool) here at the end of May. It may not be on your mind but now is the time to think and begin management for house and stable flies. Fly parasites need to be purchased and set out early in the season so that the fly population does not out pace their own. Clean up manure, feed piles, and organic breeding grounds used by flies around the barn. There is no easy method of fly control. *You must practice good sanitary management practices for success.* All the insecticide in the world will not make up for poor management.

FARM BUSINESS MANAGEMENT: For those who haven't been wandering Greenwich earlier in the month or been watching the local papers, just an update. The NYS FFA Convention was held in Greenwich during the first week in May. Over 700 kids descended on the area to participate in an extravaganza of competition, education and camaraderie. It was exciting to behold but even more so when you realize that really one of the main things that made this event possible were all of the local businesses and farms getting behind it and participating. I was glad to do my part but want to thank everyone else for doing theirs.

CROPS

Soil Health: *WHAT IS THE SOIL pH IN EACH OF YOUR FIELDS???* Soil pH affects the availability of fertilizer and nutrients to plants, the root health, and the biological activity of the soil. For alfalfa, keep the soil pH above 6.5 (bring it to 7.0 before seeding), and for corn, grasses and clover, do not let it drop below 6.0 (but 6.2 would be better).

Alfalfa: The cool temperatures will help slow alfalfa maturity during this rainy period when we can not harvest. We are almost a week behind on heat for alfalfa. Typically alfalfa is ready for harvest at 700 GDD (base 41). Today we are at 500 GDD – except Whitehall (at Lock 12)

which is very close to 700. Hopefully a harvest window will open up after Memorial Day. Some fields are short while others are not. Check the pH and nutrient levels for these short fields. When a harvest window does come, try to let the haycrops get some sun (for a day) and replenish their sugar level before you harvest. Otherwise you will have a very low energy feed after several cloudy days. Do not cut hay the morning after a long stretch of cloudy weather.

I have only seen three leaves on new seedlings. Everything is growing slowly, but what I have seen looks healthy (no seedling diseases).

Still alfalfa weevils are low in number.

Field Corn: Normally at this time of year we try to convince farmers to stop planting corn so that they can harvest their haylage on time. This year, as of today, most corn is already planted, and everyone is waiting for some sun to harvest haylage.

This weather is the reason why we use insecticide and fungicide seed treatments. Cold soils and no sun giving bugs and fungi a longer time to attack seedling corn that is not growing very fast. **Black cutworm (BCW)** seem to be out – I saw typical damage, but no culprit. Wireworm and grubs are active. Pay close attention to weedy fields and sods plowed this spring.

I noticed some no-till corn that had old corn residue “pinned” down into the furrow. It hurt populations by at least 10%. Row cleaners can help address this problem. Every condition must be met for no-till corn to be successful: good soil structure; proper soil moisture at planting; clearing trash and rock from in front of the planter unit; weed control; etc. etc.

Check corn populations by counting the seedlings in 1/1000th of an acre (17 ft. 5 in. of row for 30-inch rows) then multiplying by 1,000. Count the seedlings in the row of each planter unit to check for poorly functioning row units.

Grasses: Again, this year Jerry Cherney (Cornell) has noticed grass (and alfalfa) drop in NDF during early/mid May. Since %NDF is dependant on the volume of other plant contents, a rise in something like sugars (from lots of sun after a cloudy period) can actually drop the %NDF. The cause of the NDF drop has not been confirmed, but sun and sugar formation is a logical argument. This week in central NY, Kevin Ganoë (CCE) sampled six grass fields that averaged **51% NDF** (perfect) and ranged from 47.8 to 53% NDF.

Grasses are pretty short. Maturity is affected mostly by daylength, so even with cool weather, we should see grass heads about on schedule. A little heat will help the plants grow in size faster and pop out the grass heads.

Pasture: Points on grazing brown-midrib sorghum sudan: You can graze it at no less than 18”. But you can also graze it from 4 ft to 7 ft because it does not accumulate lignin (indigestible fiber), plus the cows graze the best part and leave the rest. So, some clipping of stalks may be needed. BMR SS will regrow after grazing (or mowing) – you should leave about 3 inches of stubble. You will maximize yield if you graze it at 4 ft and possibly loose yield if you graze it at less than 40 in.

VEGETABLES

Cold temperatures prevail, but at least we are getting some much needed rain. Lots of plastic mulch being laid because of increased soil moisture conditions. Transplants need to get out of crowded greenhouses and into the field, now we just need the weather to cooperate. In areas of the county where soil is light, some crops look reasonably good. Some peas up around a foot.

Most salad greens are pretty happy with the cool weather, but germination of certain crops is extremely SLOW! In general crops are showing stress related to cold and dry soils. The symptoms include marginal leaf burn, purplish to brown leaves, slow growth rate. In fact these symptoms pretty much mirror what you would see if the plant had a Phosphorus or Magnesium deficiency, which is part of what is happening. Due to the prolonged cool temperatures, the plant's root growth slows as does its ability to take up nutrients, thus causing lots of leaf symptoms that look like chilling injury (yellowing, stunting).

Frost Damage to Cool Season Crops - Recent frosts may have damaged cool season crops that we usually consider tolerant of cold conditions. Growers should be aware of the potential for crop loss so that they can make plans for the rest of the growing season.

Small carrot and onion seedlings can be killed by frosts around 25 to 27 degrees F. Plants are most susceptible just as they emerge from the soil. Dead plants wither and die quickly. Usually, plant death is spotty across a field, with lower and sandier spots suffering more mortality.

Carrots may survive the frost, but if frost causes the soil to form a crust and heave, their small taproots can be broken. The plants then survive, but have only a short, misshapen root. The injury is similar to water damage later in the season. Damage is most severe with a damp soil surface, which forms a crust easily with moderate frost. Broken taproots after a frost occur more frequently on muck than on sand.

Soon after carrots germinate they enter a period of growth called the "juvenile" phase. This period may last until eight true leaves are present. The length of the juvenile phase varies by variety. Plants in the juvenile phase will be unaffected by cool temperatures. Those that have passed through this phase, however, will be susceptible to the effects of cool temperatures which simulates the winter cold period and signals the plants to bolt. Ten to 15 days of temperatures in the low 40's will be enough to stimulate flowering. In fact, studies have shown that at 32F, the rate of flowering is relatively low but rises linearly up to 42F when it begins to fall again until leveling off at a low percentage of flowering at 52F and above. Unfortunately, plants that undergo these cool temperatures may grow and appear normal until bolting later in the season. The effect of temperature on bolting is variety dependent, some requiring a very long time at the chilling temperature while others a shorter time. Bolting is usually worse in fields that have been planted early. Plants in these fields have likely passed through the juvenile phase and are susceptible to cool spring temperatures. Later planted fields are still likely in the juvenile phase and remain unaffected.

Onions can be induced to bolt by prolonged cold temperatures in the seedling stage. Plants may be induced after the two to three leaf stage. There is nothing growers can do now, but when seeders occur later in the season, growers may want to pull them by hand.

Cole crop transplants can survive a light frost as long as the growing tip is unaffected. Of greater concern is the chance that continued cool temperatures (40-55° F for 10 days)) will lead to bolting in cabbage, Chinese cabbage, broccoli and cauliflower. Plants in the 3-5 leaf stage are usually safe. Plants with more than this number of leaves are more susceptible. Bolting is

variety dependent. *Written by: Bernard Zandstra, Michigan State University and Steve Reiners, Cornell University*

Reducing Surface Crusting: Crusting is a symptom of poor soil structure that develops with intensively and clean-tilled soils. As a short-term solution, farmers can use tools, such as rotary hoes and finger weeders, to break up the crust. The best long-term approach is to reduce tillage intensity, use tillage systems that leave residue or mulch on the surface, and improve aggregate stability with organic matter additions. Even residue covers as low as 30% will greatly reduce crusting and provide important pathways for water entry. Reducing tillage and maintaining significant amounts of surface residues not only prevents crusting, but also rebuild the soil by reducing decomposition of organic matter. Soils with very low aggregate stability may sometimes benefit from surface applications of gypsum (calcium sulfate). The added calcium and the effect of greater salt concentration in the soil water both promote aggregation. *From Building Soils for Better Crops by Fred Magdoff and Harold van Es.*

Landscape:

Spring and Fall Cankerworms and Eastern Tent Caterpillar are out in numbers, but the big news is Forest Tent Caterpillar. This pest seems to have moved slightly south this year, but still showing the greatest numbers in the northern section of the county. It will be important to try and protect landscape plants as much as possible. Spray trees and shrubs where you see them with Bt and/or SEVIN. Rotating the two materials might not be a bad idea as some homeowners might be surrounded by woodlands and landscape trees could be continually infested for the next 6 weeks.

Invasive Wood-Killing Insect Alert

Discovery: E. Richard Hoebeke, a Cornell University entomologist, collected the Old World woodwasp on Sept. 7 in Fulton County northwest of Albany as he sifted for bark beetles caught in screening traps. He identified the adult female bug on Feb. 19. The wasp is about an inch long and has a broad waist and distinct antennas.

What is it? The invasive insect species, *Sirex noctilio* Fabricius, has ruined up to 80 percent of pine trees in areas of New Zealand, Australia, South America and South Africa, Hoebeke said. If established in the United States, it would threaten pines coast-to-coast, particularly in the pine-dense Southeast. One target would be loblolly pines in Georgia. The woodwasp, which is native to Europe, Asia and northern Africa, kills pines and sometimes other conifers by introducing a toxic mucus and spores of a toxic fungus when the female lays her eggs through the bark and into the sapwood.

Where to look? Because the bug likes stressed wood, scientists will also examine facilities such as mills that make packaging materials out of wood that is unfit for uses like construction. They'll also use aerial photography to identify stands of pine that look unhealthy. Douglas Allen, a forest entomologist with The College of Environmental Science and Forestry in Syracuse, said he thinks the pest whose primary taste runs toward the Monterey pine could easily develop a liking for other pines in this country.

How did it get here? Since 1985 U.S. Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service inspectors have intercepted seven male woodwasps at border points; all had come with tile and marble imports from Spain and Italy. Experts suspect the

female trapped in Fulton County probably hitchhiked into the area on a wooden crate or in packing material.

Sincerely,

Aaron D. Gabriel
Extension Resource Educator
Crops and Soils