

# **FOCUS on South Plains Agriculture**

A newsletter from the Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Extension Center at Lubbock

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# Cotton Entomology

## Cotton aphids: concern for sticky cotton

Cotton harvest in the Texas High Plains is around the corner. In terms of crop stage, some fields will be ready in a week or two while some fields have cotton with several nodes worth of green leaves and actively growing terminals. Almost all of the fruits, which are going to be harvestable bolls, are safe from injury from any insect pests. However, cotton aphids could still be a concern for our cotton at this stage. This is especially true for plants with some open bolls and with a considerable amount of new growth that could be a potential site for development of cotton aphid populations. Late last week I saw a few fields infested with cotton aphids. In fact, one of the experimental fields in Lubbock was sprayed for cotton aphids.

Cotton aphids are small yellow to dark green colored insect. They could be either wingless or winged, but late in the season winged adults are more prevalent than early in the growing season. I have observed a considerable number of winged cotton aphids and they are easily blown over long distances; a field could be infested by cotton aphids in a short amount of time. Cotton aphids prefer young leaves, growing points, young fruits, and tender stems compared to any older growth. Therefore, one should check these plant parts to spot cotton aphids in a field. At the same time, if possible, try to get an idea of the beneficial insects present. Beneficial insects have potential to suppress aphid numbers to a great extent and thus insecticide applications can be avoided.

At this time, the primary concern with cotton aphids is whether they would cause sticky cotton by their honeydew. If weather conditions are favorable and beneficial insect activities are low, then aphid population can grow at a faster pace and may result sticky cotton provided there are open bolls. A quarter inch of rain sometimes helps to get rid of sticky cotton. So, I suggest our producers check their cotton fields, especially if you have fields with some regrowth. It may be desirable to plan for harvest aid applications if field is ready rather than leaving the crop available for cotton aphids. The threshold for cotton aphids is 10 aphids per leaf when there are cracked bolls on the plant. There are several effective insecticides for cotton aphids such as Transform<sup>®</sup> 0.75-1.0 oz/A, Centric<sup>®</sup> @ 1.25-2.5 oz/A, Carbine<sup>®</sup> 1.4-2.8 oz/A, and Intruder<sup>®</sup> 0.6-1.1 oz/A, which should help in bringing down the pest population.

Please do not hesitate to reach me at [Apurba.Barman@ag.tamu.edu](mailto:Apurba.Barman@ag.tamu.edu) or 806-407-2830 (cell) regarding any cotton insect related questions. **AB**



*Figure 1. Cotton aphids on underside of a cotton leaf*



*Figure 2. Two primary beneficial insects those feed on cotton aphids:  
lady beetle (left) and lacewing (right) larva*

# Corn and Sorghum Insects

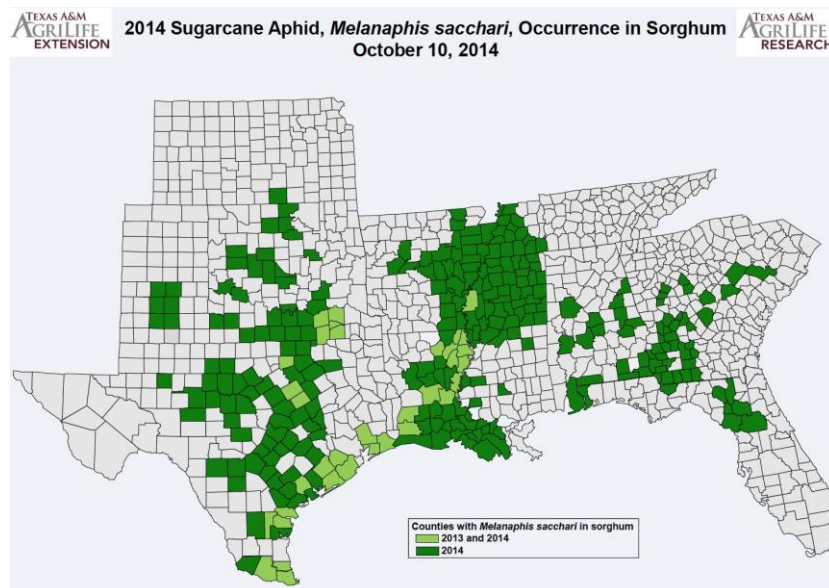
## Sugarcane aphid expands range

Sugarcane aphid has now been found in Swisher, Briscoe, Hale, Floyd, Lubbock and Crosby counties. We found it at the Lubbock Research Center last Friday in several spots in a field that had panicles ranging from green to red. Colonies were 1 – 4 inches in length and several adjacent plants in the row were infested. A few of the aphids had wings and could have dispersed to new fields by now.

Unfortunately, there is a lot we don't know about how sugarcane aphid populations will respond to conditions here. It might be cool enough to avoid the rapid population increases that can occur right up to the time of harvest. I attended a meeting on this aphid last week where people from south of here were talking about having to scout twice per week. I asked them whether they meant that their scouts might miss something early in the week and would find it late in the week, or whether the aphid numbers could explode so quickly that even good scouting early in the week still left a field in danger. The reply I got from a very seasoned Mississippi State University field entomologist who said rather emphatically, "This is the first pest I have encountered that could go from barely there to Oh My God in five days."

I don't think we are at risk for such rapid increases this season, mostly because the nights are relatively cold and the days are not that warm anymore. That being said, I did not see any biological control agents in the Lubbock field last week either, so if populations can increase in this climate they can do so without biological control slowing them down. The bottom line is that all types of sorghum need to be scouted until just short of harvest.

**RPP**



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