

Fall Armyworms!!!

By: Peyton Sapp

County Extension Coordinator, Burke Co.

For release week of August 18, 2010

It seems like ninety percent of the calls that have come into the Extension office over the past few weeks have been about Fall Armyworms. They have been in hayfields, pastures and even cotton. Well, you know they are here and most know (if you did not already) how much damage they can cause! The question is, "...how long will they stay around...?"

There are typically three or more generations of fall armyworms each year. Most of the farms I have seen have had newly hatched worms and large worms in the same fields. This means we have had multiple generations already. Each year, fall armyworm moths, carried by air currents, make their way from Central and South America. The size of the initial moth flights and timing are two factors that influence the outbreak potential in a given year.

Hopefully the recent rains that we have seen over some parts of the county will help slow the armyworms down. It will pay, however to scout for the pests until cold weather gets here. Development from egg to fully grown larva requires about 2 to 3 weeks. At this point, larvae burrow into the soil and form pupae. The moths emerge in about 10 to 14 days.

The moths are an ash-gray moth with a wing-span of about 1½ inches. The front wings are mottled and have white or light gray spots near the tips. The back wings are white with a narrow, smoky brown edge. They lay eggs at night in masses of up to several hundred on light-colored surfaces, such as fence rails, tree trunks, and the underside of tree limbs. Egg masses start out light gray and covered with grayish fuzz from the female's body. They darken with age. All of the eggs hatch within 2 to 4 days of each other.

Fall Armyworms have caused significant damage to pastures and hayfields and have also been infested lawns and other crops as well. We may not have any relief until cold weather

moves in. Learning to look for moths, egg masses and how to scout for small worms may help you catch another infestation in time. One rule of thumb is to start checking for small caterpillars two weeks after damage has occurred.

If you would like more information on controlling fall armyworms, contact the Burke County Extension Office at (706)554-2119.