

CROP NOTES for April 30, 2009

Past issues of Crop Notes are posted at:

<http://www.extension.iastate.edu/winneshiek/info/crops.htm>

Iowa State University Extension Information for Northeast Iowa

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WEATHER

Soil Temperatures

Currently, average soil temperatures are in the low 50's.

Soil temperature readings are available at: <http://extension.agron.iastate.edu/NPKnowledge/>

Elwynn Taylor says that the next 2 weeks forecast for the Corn Belt will be cool, whereas it is ideal is for it to be slightly warmer than usual at this time.

MORE ON WINTER KILL

Alfalfa, Orchardgrass, Ryegrass, Winter Wheat

Alfalfa: Roughly 15% of the alfalfa stands across northeast Iowa have sufficient winter injury such that they are not worth keeping. The injury is a mix of ice sheet/smothering in some low spots and injury from cold temperature exposure on ridge tops and some side slopes (often north slopes). Looking back at winter temperatures, it was particularly cold in the month of January with minimum daily air temperatures falling below zero 12 of 31 days, and in double digits below zero 5 of those days. No doubt those temperatures combined with lack of snow cover caused the plant injury on ridge tops and some side slopes. Differences in variety winter hardiness and disease resistance, plant stubble left in fall, age of stand, intensity of 2008 cutting schedules, soil pH and fertility, plant stress from the previous hard winter, etc. likely played a role in the amount of winter injury we see now.

Now is the perfect time to use the “Stem Count” method to evaluate alfalfa stands. A road-side view can be very misleading because dandelions and winter annuals have also greened up quite nicely. Ideal stands would have 55 or more stems per square foot. The 35 to 40 stems per square foot range are marginal stands. Less than that are not keepers unless there is also a good stand of forage grass in the field. When counting stems, I would include any visible green shoots of an inch or more developing off the crowns. Young plants may only have 5 to 10 shoots per plant, and old plants as many as 30 per plant. I would count stems in 2 to 3 square foot areas to calibrate my eyes as to what 30 or 40 or 50 stems per square foot looks like, and then just walk other areas of the field and look at the stand relating to my earlier counts. Adding to the difficulty in assessing the field using stem counts is the extreme spottiness of stand losses. There is a video on YouTube from Dan Undersander, University of Wisconsin, regarding evaluating alfalfa stands. You may find this useful, although the picture clarity is not very good. Go to: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jujW3-FE4zE>

Winter Wheat: The same kind of winter injury has impacted winter wheat stands. By now you can easily tell if a plant is a survivor or not. University of Minnesota states that a full stand is 21 to 23 plants per square foot. They add that 17 plants per square foot often yield similar to a full stand, and 11 plants per square foot can still yield about 80% of a full stand. Again, the problem with this spring’s winter injury is the spottiness, with nearly complete kill on ridge tops, partial kill on some side slopes, complete kill in low spots with ice sheeting, and good stands across the remainder of the field.

Perennial ryegrass and orchardgrass fields look similar to the winter wheat and alfalfa fields. Perennial ryegrass is our least winter hardy commonly used grass that we attempt to over winter this far north. It has done just fine with mild winters, but this winter (January) was very cold. Orchardgrass is our second least winter hardy commonly used grass that we use. When selecting orchardgrass varieties, pay attention to the range in winter hardiness between varieties. Some are rated significantly hardier than others. This is often but not always correlated to flowering dates... i.e. usually those orchardgrasses that flower earlier in spring are also rated better in winter hardiness. However, for those that like to use an orchardgrass that does not flower as early in spring, there are a few varieties with later flowering dates that still have good winter hardiness ratings. Your seed dealer could help sort this out in selecting future varieties.

INSECTS

Alfalfa Weevil

Northeast Iowa is just beginning to enter into scouting time for Alfalfa Weevil. The following article from the ICM News has everything you need to know about scouting for the pest. <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/CropNews/2009/041709pope.htm> There are no reports yet of alfalfa weevil in northeast Iowa, and most years we reach first crop harvest without any significant alfalfa weevil problems. This insect is more of a problem to the south, and as of Monday there were no reports of alfalfa weevil in Southern Iowa or Illinois.

Black Cutworm

This week there was a significant catch of Black Cutworm moths in the Clayton County area. We will now begin to add up degree days (300 DD base 51 F) to predict time to start scouting for

the presence of young larvae in corn fields. A recent article in the ICM News addresses Black Cutworm. <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/CropNews/2009/0428tollefson.htm> I'll come back to the scouting tips in this article when we get closer to scouting time. Starting from earlier this week, 300 DD puts us at about May 15.

Corn Flea Beetle

This pest and the disease it can spread (Stewart's Wilt) is usually not a threat to northeast Iowa, and again this appears to be the case. The map illustrating the predictive threat of this pest to Iowa at the following web link shows negligible risk.

<http://www.extension.iastate.edu/CropNews/2009/041409pope.htm>

WEEDS

Planting Restrictions with 2,4-D Burndown

With planting currently delayed due to wet soil conditions, and fields beginning to green up with weeds, this is just a reminder that if 2,4-D is used as a pre-plant herbicide, there are recommended planting restrictions of 1 or 2 weeks depending on rate applied. Go to the following article for details: <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/CropNews/2009/0423hartzler.htm>

MISCELLANEOUS

Winter Dessication of Evergreens

Winter burn has affected many trees and shrubs. The following article addresses current injury, survival and future prevention of the problem.

<http://www.ipm.iastate.edu/ipm/hortnews/node/2028>

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