

2009 Sorghum Insect Control Recommendations

Introduction

Grain sorghum is an important minor rotational crop in Tennessee. Sorghum is more drought-tolerant than either corn or soybeans, and provides another non-host crop for managing soybean cyst nematode populations. Grain sorghum can be used in a double-crop system following wheat or as a late-planted grain crop.

Several insect pests may reduce yields. By planting grain sorghum on the recommended dates, some insect problems can be reduced or avoided. Infestations of the sorghum midge, corn earworm, fall armyworm and sorghum webworm will cause more damage to late-planted sorghum. Fortunately, there are many insecticides that will control economically damaging populations of sorghum insect pests.

Insects Sucking Juices from Leaves

Different types of aphids may be found on grain sorghum early in the season. These insects are found on top and underneath the leaves and whorls of sorghum plants, where they cause damage by sucking juices from the plant. The most common aphids found in grain sorghum are the greenbug and the corn leaf aphid. The greenbug injects plant tissue with toxic saliva and both types of aphids can transmit viral diseases like Maize Dwarf Mosaic Virus.

Insects Feeding on Grain Heads and Seed Kernels

The sorghum midge and sorghum webworm feed on the ripening grain kernels. Sorghum webworms feed on the ripening kernels by devouring the inside and leaving the hollow kernel shell. Corn earworms and fall armyworms usually consume the entire kernel as they feed.

Insects Feeding on Leaf Tissue

Corn earworms and fall armyworms feed in the whorls of young grain sorghum plants. Severe feeding injury to the growing point or intercalary meristem may destroy the emerging grain head.

Recommended Planting Dates

Grain sorghum should be planted from May 1 to June 1 for highest yields. Planting before mid-May will avoid some insect damage from the midge, fall armyworm, sorghum webworm and corn earworm.

Scouting Procedures for Sorghum Insects and Economic Threshold Levels

Greenbug

A small, light green aphid with a dark green stripe down the back. It is approximately 1/16-inch long. Reproductive potential is very high compared to other aphids. Early-planted sorghum is more susceptible to attack from greenbug. Look on the undersides of leaves for these small green aphids. Treat when one or two greenbugs are on a majority of the plants in the seedling stage and leaves are showing damage. The greenbug has a toxic substance in its saliva that causes red spots on leaves where it has fed. In larger plants, treat when one or two leaves per plant are dying.

Corn Leaf Aphid

The cornicles (tail-pipes at the end of the abdomen), legs and antennae of this species are black. The body is bluish-green and about 1/16-inch long. Aphids are usually found feeding in the whorl of the sorghum plant. Check primarily in the whorls of sorghum plants for this insect. The corn leaf aphid does not inject toxic saliva into the leaves, as do greenbugs, but can transmit viral diseases if Johnsongrass is present in the field. Sorghum plants can tolerate a large number of these insects, so treatments are usually unnecessary.

Sorghum Midge

This is a small, gnat-like insect, reddish-orange and about 1/10-inch long. Female sorghum midges lay eggs in the spikelets and seed husks during the bloom stage of sorghum. The larvae feed on the developing seeds, causing them to dry up and die. Check grain heads from emergence through bloom stage twice a week. Place a clear plastic bag over the head and shake, allowing the bag to remain over the head. Observe any midges that may light on the insides of the bag walls. Treat when an average of one midge per grain head is found.

Sorghum Webworm

This is a small, hairy caterpillar with four reddish-brown stripes down its back. Full-grown larvae are about 1/2-inch long. They are usually associated with a sticky webbing in the area of their feeding. Check inside grain heads for tiny 1/2-inch worms and on leaves under grain heads for white fecal droppings from these insects. Close examination is necessary. Treat when an average of 3-4 or more larvae is found per grain head.

Corn Earworm

This larva has alternating light and dark stripes down its body. The skin is set with tiny spines and the color varies from green to pink. The head capsule is a creamy-yellow. Full grown larvae are about 1½ inches long. Corn earworms feed in the whorls of young plants, and can devour entire grain kernels. Check in the whorls of young plants and inside the grain heads of older plants. Treat when an average of two or more small larvae or one large (> 1/2 inch) larva is found per head.

Fall Armyworm

Larvae have a dark head capsule and a more prominent inverted Y on the front of the head. The body color is greenish to brownish, with brownish to black stripes on the sides of the body. Check in the whorls of young late-planted sorghum plants and inside the grain heads of more mature plants. Treat when an average of two or more small larvae or one large (> 1/2 inch) larva is found per head.

Insecticide Seed Treatments

Insecticidal seed treatments (e.g., Cruiser, Gaucho, Poncho) are available from seed companies. Seed treatments will help control some seed and seedling pests such as chinch bug, greenbug, wireworms and white grubs. However, there are insufficient data showing an economic return of these treatments in Tennessee.

Recommended Chemical Controls for Sorghum Insects

Insect Pest	Insecticide	Rate Product Per Acre	Pre-Harvest Days* (Grain)
Aphids, including greenbugs**	chlorpyrifos (Lorsban 4)	0.5 – 2 pt	30 – 60
	chlorpyrifos, γ -cyhalothrin (Cobalt)	13 oz	30
	dimethoate 4	0.5 – 1 pt	See label
Sorghum Midge	chlorpyrifos (Lorsban 4)	0.5 pt	30
	chlorpyrifos, γ -cyhalothrin (Cobalt)	7 – 13 oz	30
	methomyl (Lannate LV 2.4)	0.75 – 1.5 pt	14
	β -cyfluthrin (Baythroid XL 1)	1.0 – 1.3 oz	14
	γ -cyhalothrin (Prolex 1.25)	0.77 – 1.02 oz	21
	λ -cyhalothrin (Karate 2.08, Warrior II)	0.92 – 1.23 oz	30
	Z-cypermethrin (Mustang Max 0.8)	1.28 – 4.0 oz	14
Corn Earworms & Sorghum Webworm	carbaryl (Sevin 80S)	1.25 – 2.5 lb	21
	carbaryl (Sevin XLR 4)	1 – 2 pt	21
	chlorpyrifos (Lorsban 4)	1 – 2 pt ***	30-60
	chlorpyrifos, γ -cyhalothrin (Cobalt)	19 – 38 oz	See label
	methomyl (Lannate LV 2.4)	1.5 pt	14
	spinosad (Tracer 4)	1.5 – 3.0 oz	7
	β -cyfluthrin (Baythroid XL 1)	1.3 – 2.8 oz	14
	γ -cyhalothrin (Prolex 1.25)	1.02 – 1.54 oz	21
	λ -cyhalothrin (Karate 2.08, Warrior II)	1.23 – 1.85 oz	30
	Z-cypermethrin (Mustang Max 0.8)	1.76 – 4.0 oz	14

Insect Pest	Insecticide	Rate Product Per Acre	Pre-Harvest Days* (Grain)
Fall Armyworm	carbaryl (Sevin 80S)	1.25 – 2.5 lb	21
	carbaryl (Sevin XLR 4)	1 – 2 qt	21
	chlorpyrifos (Lorsban 4)	1 – 2 pt	30-60
	chlorpyrifos, γ -cyhalothrin (Cobalt)	19 – 38 oz	See label
	methomyl (Lannate LV 2.4)	0.75 – 1.5 pt	14
	spinosad (Tracer 4)	1.5 – 3.0 oz	7
	β -cyfluthrin (Baythroid XL 1)	1.3 – 2.8 oz	14
	γ -cyhalothrin (Prolex 1.2)	1.02 – 1.54 oz	21
	λ -cyhalothrin (Karate 2.08, Warrior II)	1.23 – 1.85 oz	30
	Z-cypermethrin (Mustang Max 0.8)	1.76 – 4.0 oz	14
Stink Bugs	carbaryl (Sevin 80S)	1.5 – 2.5 lb	21
	carbaryl (Sevin XLR 4)	1.2 – 2 qt	21
	chlorpyrifos, γ -cyhalothrin (Cobalt)	19 – 38 oz	See label
	β -cyfluthrin (Baythroid XL 1)	1.3 – 2.8 oz	14
	γ -cyhalothrin (Prolex 1.25)	1.02 – 1.54 oz	21
	λ -cyhalothrin (Karate 2.08, Warrior II)	1.23 – 1.85 oz	30
	Z-cypermethrin (Mustang Max 0.8)	1.7 – 4.0 oz	14

* Waiting period from insecticide application until grain harvest.

** Controls usually unnecessary for corn leaf aphids.

*** Use higher rate for control of corn earworm