

Column Name- The Heartland Minute

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*“Detecting Early Season Pests in Wheat”*

According K-State field crop entomologist Jeff Whitworth, A wave of warm weather in the middle of February may draw attention to winter grain mites – a concern to many farmers – but they aren’t doing any damage right now. Winter grain mites are in the egg stage right now. There are a few active nymphs and adults though. You may go out on a warmer night with a flashlight and see some feeding on leaves, but they will be down in the soil not really doing damage on colder nights.

The three main wheat pests we need to worry about causing damage in the early season are winter grain mites, army cutworms, and hessian flies. Army cutworms will be feeding anytime the temperatures are over 40-50 degrees Fahrenheit. The hessian fly is dormant right now, but if you have places in your wheat field last fall that looked like they were going backwards or dying with dark blue-gray colored leaves, pull those up and you’ll see little mahogany colored, cigar-shaped flaxseed. That is the resting stage of the hessian fly. When we reach consistently warm weather, then these three pests mature and may cause damage.

Lack of soil moisture will add to pest-caused damage once crops break dormancy. When they emerge and cause damage, it is going to show even more because those plants are also struggling for moisture. A good idea is to go out and try to figure out where these populations are, but you don’t need to do anything about them right now. Whitworth recommends sampling or monitoring the weak or thin areas to determine if the cause is pest-related and plan your action based up on pest identification. Do not apply pesticide until plants have broken dormancy because they do not work as well below 50 degrees F.

Information comes from Kansas State University field crop entomologist Jeff Whitworth.

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