

## Watch for alfalfa pests

NEWARK, DE — Over the next few weeks, many farmers will be busy planting corn. But alfalfa has already begun to grow rapidly, so it's important to take time to scout these fields for early signs of pest activity.

One disease to watch for is *Sclerotinia* crown and stem rot, which can cause significant stand losses in fall-seeded fields. According to University of Delaware extension plant pathologist Bob Mulrooney, this fungus attacks new seedlings in the fall and overwinters in infected plants. Come spring, it starts to grow again—especially in cool, wet weather.

New infections appear as pinpoint water-soaked spots on alfalfa leaves and stems, which eventually turn yellow and collapse.

Mulrooney says the only way to control this disease is to avoid contact with the fungus. He recommends: (1) avoiding fall seeding on sites where the fungus was present the previous spring, (2) a three to four year rotation between forage legumes if spring symptoms are present, and (3) deep plowing to bury the fungus source.

While scouting for alfalfa diseases, also check for insect pests. The alfalfa weevil is the biggest problem on the first cutting, says extension pest management specialist Joanne Whalen. Research has shown that this insect can severely reduce the yield and quality of an alfalfa stand, so close monitoring and early detection are needed to keep populations at low levels.

Larval feeding generally begins shortly after plant growth starts in the spring. Damage initially appears as small pinholes in newly opened leaves. As the larvae mature, these feeding holes enlarge and the leaves appear shredded and skeletonized. Heavily infested fields may look gray.

Whalen says growers should start checking for alfalfa weevil larvae and tip feeding in mid-April. While scouting fields the first week of the month, she found feeding signs on only 5 to 10 percent of plants checked. With favorable growing conditions over the next few weeks, the alfalfa could stay one step ahead of the weevil, she says.

Alfalfa growers should base

their treatment decisions on a random sample of 30 stems collected throughout a field, the specialist advises.

"Place stems in a bucket and beat them against the inside to dislodge larvae. In general, we recommend an insecticide treatment if two or more larvae are found per stem. Remember, long-lasting residual materials are more likely to kill parasites of the weevil, so use short-lived insecticides."

Growers often ask Whalen if they should cut or spray their alfalfa when they find a threshold level of weevils.

"In general," she says, "if the crop is in the full bud stage and a

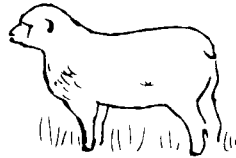
threshold level is reached, we recommend harvesting the field instead of spraying. However, if the population level is steady and you can't harvest in the next three to five days, apply a short residual insecticide immediately."

While scouting for alfalfa weevils, growers may also find pea aphids feeding on plant stems. Because these are cool-season pests, outbreaks generally occur on the first cutting of alfalfa. Even though the aphids seldom reach economically important levels, high populations can cause

significant stand reduction.

Make control decisions on a random sample of 30 plants collected throughout the field. Whalen recommends an insecticide treatment if 50 to 75 aphids are found per stem.

Delaware residents who want further information on in-season crop pest activity can call the University of Delaware Cooperative Extension Service CROP PEST HOTLINE at 1-800-345-7544. Out-of-state residents should call 1-302-451-8851.



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## AUCTIONS

**APRIL 27TH - SAMUEL T. JONES LUMBER CO., INC.**, Millers Tavern, Va., (Near Tappahannock) 10:30 a.m. - Mill, Chip-n-Saw, and Equipment. Equipment Selling Includes: Chip-n-Saw w/End Feed & Computer; Edger; Trimmer; Carriage; Berry Feed; Debarker; Chipper; Forklift; Loader; Skidder; 2-Gindy Open Top Trailers, 40 ft.; 1976 Fruehauf Flat Trailer; 1980 Dunham "U290" Log-Hog Loader; and many more items.

**MAY 4TH - DAN. M. BAPTIST LUMBER CO.** Boykins, Va., 10:30 a.m. - 10:30 a.m., Sawmill, Rolling Stock & Logging Equipment, Equipment Selling Includes: Fulghum Debarker & Bark Conveyor, Frick Mill, 200 h.p. Motor, Frick Edger, Fulghum Chipper, Newman Trimmer, Decks w/Stops & Loaders, Berry Feed, Mellott Log Truner, Roll Case, Air Compressor, and many more items.

**MAY 4TH - 4:00 P.M.** - Two Story Frame Dwelling, 9 Rooms & Baths, Boykins, Va. (Corner of Beaton Ave. & East St.)

**5:30 P.M.** - 25.12 Acres, Near Emporia, Va., Small Peanut Allotment, Northside of Rt. 661. (Southampton Co.) Terms: 10% Deposit Sale Day, Balance at Closing.

**MAY 10TH - HANOVER TRANSPORT, INC.** - G Trans Co., Ashland, Va. - 10:30 a.m. 10 Tractors, 21 Van Trailers, Flat Trailer, Cessna 177 RG Airplane, Yale Ready Power Crane Car, many more items.

**MAY 11TH - CEDAR ROAD MATERIALS**, 1223 Standard Street, Norfolk, Va. - 10:30 a.m. Equipment Including: Gang Nail Mark IV Roof Truss Machine, Moving Press w/50 ton Hd., 14' Throat. Complete Package also includes a 90' x 13' Table, Drive Chain, Track & Kicklegs; Speed Cut Metra-Cut Radial Arm Saw; Truswal Spacejoist Machine; Truswal Spacejoist Machine w/40' jig. Excellent Condition; Taylor Forklift; 20 H.P. Champion Air Compressor; Truswal Lumber Splicer; Dewalt Radial Arm Saw; 1976 Datsun Forklift; 1973 White Tandem Road Boss Tractor; 1971 Dorsey 40' Flatbed Trailer; 2 other Flatbed Trailers, 4-Dropdeck Trailers; Truss Buggy; Pettibone Hyd. Crane; many more items.

**MAY 17TH - MOUNTAIN VIEW FARM**, Complete Dairy Dispersal, Rocky Mount, Va. - 10:30 a.m. - 235 Holstein Cows & Heifers, 183 Cow Herd. Milking at the 45 lb. level. Farm Equipment Sells including 3 J.D. Diesel Tractors, (4630, 3020, 2020), Hy-Dynamic Diesel w/Loader and Backhoe, A.C. 7000 Diesel, Oliver 77 Gas, 4 Trucks, N.H. Haybine, N.H. 880 Field Harvester, A.C. Sod Planter, Feeding Wagons, and many more items.

**MAY 18TH - McMICHAEL'S SERVICE CENTER**, Nokesville, Va. 10:30 a.m. - Complete Liquidation of all used Farm, Lawn and Garden Equipment and some new machinery. New 2+2 4-wheel drive Int. 3588 Tractor, 135 hp, PTO, cab, air, radio - 2 Combines - 18 Tractors - 3 Skid Loaders - 2 Trucks - New, 2 Taylorway Offset Disc Harrows - New, Bush Hog Rotary Mower, New, Sidewinder Rotary Mower - Balers, Selling at Noon - 2 HARVESTSTORES (20x60 and 25x80) at 1:30 p.m. Farm Machinery and Antique Equipment of CLIFFORD BEAR, JR. ESTATE, Nokesville, Va. 1969 Chev. C50 2T Truck, Int. 400 Gas Tractor and many more items.

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## How much rent?

NEWARK, De. — Land rental rates, like any other production factor, should be tied to the productivity of that factor. You can only afford to pay high rent for highly productive soils," says University of Delaware extension farm management specialist Dr. Don Tilmon.

He suggests farmers take a close look at the rates they're paying for rented land. "If the rate is too high, next year try to re-negotiate your rental agreement to either a lower rate, a flexible cash lease or a share lease that spreads some of your risk between you and your landlord," he advises. "If all else fails, give up the rented land. It's better to farm smarter than bigger."

Location of rented fields is another consideration for farmers who are trying to reduce costs. "How far do you travel to your most distant piece of land?" the specialist asks. "Rented land that's far away should be evaluated closely for its profit potential."

How about renting new land? Don't do it if the move will require the purchase of additional capital items or the commitment of additional full-time labor, Tilmon advises.

He suggests farmers use the following residual approach in deciding how much to pay for rented land:

- Calculate the cost of production, excluding rent.

- Calculate returns based on low (pessimistic), expected (average), and good (optimistic) yields times the expected (contract) price for fall delivery.

- The balance, after subtracting the production cost from the range of revenues possible, is the range of dollar values available for rent.

For more information on rental agreements and financial arrangements, contact your local extension office.