Check For Mites

(Continued from Page E1)

Jersey.

Early season reports this year from crop consultants and extension agents indicate that the winter of 2003 has not had any detrimental affect on the over-wintering adults and that eggs have already been laid and hatched. Timothy hay producers are urged to check all stands of timothy for symptoms of infestations and to be prepared to apply proper control materials in a timely manner.

Biology

Unlike most crop pests, the cereal rust mite prefers colder conditions to summer weather. The mites over-winter in the crown area of timothy plants as adults and eggs. Maryland has recorded breeding activity as early as January.

Each female can lay 20 to 30 eggs that rapidly reach maturity in 16-18 days. As a result, populations can rapidly increase.

Eggs and young larva are found on the higher leaves. Adults move down into the plant crown where they prefer to feed on the youngest growth. As the mites mature they will move out and then "stand up" on their tails and are dispersed by winds. The mites have such a great preference for timothy that if they land on a different species of plant, they will stand up and move again.

By mid-April, mite populations are rapidly building. By May, signs of heavy feeding can be noted by looking for the curled or drought characteristic. When summer temperatures arrive, the mite enters a dormancy period and is rarely observed on regrowth.

Scouting Growers of timothy should begin to monitor their stands of timothy for this pest. Scouting procedures have not been fully developed, but producers can collect representative samples from across their field. Hand lenses are avail-

able from most camera stores or mail order catalogs. A minimum of 20-power is recommended. Look for the mite on the surface side of the leaf. Immature and adult mites are similar in shape, like a "rice kernel." Eggs can be seen in many cases. The egg resembles an extremely small, round ball and will be evident across the leaf surface. Most mites and eggs will be seen in between the veins on the leaf.

Remember that because of population dynamics, a few mites can rapidly develop into an economic problem. If you do not have access to a hand lens, look for curled leaves.

Identification The cereal rust mite is an extremely small pest, actually one-sixteenth the size of a spider mite. You cannot observe them without a magnifying lens. The mites are shaped like a grain of rice, soft bodied, with four legs located near the head of this critter. They can move fairly easily up and down the leaves of the timothy plant but they prefer to feed on the youngest tissue of the plant. They are not commonly found on other grass species.

The cereal rust mite feeds on single cells at the base of the grooves between the veins on the timothy leaves. The mite inserts a "needle-like"

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