Maggots and Worms!

I have only seen sporadic stem maggot damage, and no sign of armyworms. However with the 4th of July behind us it is only a matter of time before these two pests start showing up in hay and pastures.

Armyworms are the easy ones to manage as long as you visit your field a couple times per week. The adult moths are active at night and females lay eggs in batches of 50 to several hundred. Eggs hatch in 2 - 10 days, and the young larvae begin to feed on leaf tissue. Damage from small larvae may at first look like skeletonizing, but as the worms grow, the entire leaf is consumed. Armyworms are most active early and late in the day, spending the hotter hours down near the soil in the shade. Larvae feed for 2 to 3 weeks before pupating in the soil. Moths emerge 10 - 14 days later.

If you at least get out and kick the grass in your hay fields you should be able to detect an infestation prior to the larvae destroying your field. The threshold is 3 (1/2'' or larger) larvae per square foot so it is important to look at multiple areas of the field and note the size of the caterpillars. If they are all very small then I would come back in a day or so and recheck the field. Often times small caterpillars die or are eaten by predatory insects and birds. If levels are high enough there are several effective insecticides to control the worms

The stem maggot is a little more difficult. The adult which is only about 3/8 of an inch lays an egg on a bermudagrass leaf. The larvae (maggot) hatches and makes its way down into the leaf sheath to the last node. As it burrows it feeds on the base of the leaf. This causes the leaves above the feeding to wither and die, giving the area a frosted appearance.

Once damage like this is noticed the presence of this fly can be easily confirmed. All you have to do is pull on the damaged leaves or stems. If the maggot is to blame you will be able to easily pull the stem from the sheath, and you should be able to see feeding damage at the base. Once the damage is done that is all the growth that you will get out of that cutting. You may get a little regrowth from lower nodes, but the best thing to do is to go ahead and harvest what is there.

Damage is worse on fine stemmed varieties like Alicia, but even Tift 85 can get damaged when populations are high enough. To avoid losing grass and the fertilizer that you apply after cutting hay it is important to make timely insecticide applications. If damage was noted on the previous cutting you need to apply an approved insecticide 7-10 days later. It may be necessary to retreat 7-10 days later depending on the growth of the grass.

These pests are not just a problem on forages. They can also be a problem in turf and the armyworm loves to destroy a bird field full of browntop millet. Be sure to be on the lookout and if you see a potential problem give me a call. 478-862-5496, 478-825-6466, or <u>mackiv@uga.edu</u>. On another note. The Ocmulgee River Conservation District has a new program to assist landowners with feral swine control. You can contact the districts hog control custodian. Ryan Talton - 706-897-0087; Lane Spence - 478-808-6362