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Fall Armyworms Return to NEK

Like clockwork, the annual migration of Fall Armyworms was confirmed this past week with adult moths collected in local pheromone traps. It's unfortunately become a common August theme and follows fairly significant turf damage reports from South Central Kansas.

While we're in a different place this fall than the last few (decent moisture, periods of cooler temperatures, and good grass recovery post-harvest), it's still good to be aware of the potential for feeding damage, particularly in recently harvested stands or in locations where moisture has been lacking or forage growth has been limited for some reason.

Remember: the entire cycle of the fall armyworm will be around 30 days. About two weeks of that time will be spent feeding during their larval stage. During those two weeks, larvae go from well-hidden with light feeding to over an inch long and consuming large amounts of forage daily. Fall Armyworms don't overwinter here, but they don't head back south until later in the fall, meaning additional generations are possible.

Because much of the area has seen good moisture, regrowth, even in newly harvested hay fields will hopefully be plentiful enough to withstand feeding injury if it does occur. Still, it's good to keep an eye out for thin spots in fields and monitor for feeding injury to stay ahead of potential damage issues. This will be of particular importance if weather in the latter part of the growing season results in warm/dry conditions that inhibit grass recovery prior to dormancy.

Keep in mind: fall armyworms aren't the only species that can cause feeding injury. True Armyworm and Alfalfa Caterpillars are also known forage feeders. True Armyworm *do* overwinter in Kansas and may cause feeding injury even later into the growing season than the Fall Armyworm. All forage crops (plus cover crops, wheat, and even soybean) are susceptible to one or more of these species and monitoring is recommended. With any luck, growth will outpace feeding and there won't be any issues.