INSECTS

Solenopsis mealybug

*Phenacoccus solenopsis*

The solenopsis mealybug (*Phenacoccus solenopsis*) has been found in Burdekin, Central Queensland, Burnett and most recently Darling Downs cotton crops.

**Damage symptoms**

Nymphs and adults can affect plant growth at all stages of crop development. When infested during early development, plants exhibit distorted terminal growth, crinkled and bunchy leaves, and in severe cases plant death will occur. On older plants, mealybug can cause shedding of leaves, squares and small bolls as well as fewer, smaller and deformed bolls, and premature crop senescence. Heavy infestations (>500 mealybug in top 8 nodes at cut out) has been found to have an 80% reduction in harvestable bolls. Honeydew excreted by the insects onto the leaves and lint can promote the development of black sooty mould.

**Sampling**

At low densities, mealybugs can be present anywhere on the plant. Trials on mealybug distribution within the plant revealed that they like to aggregate on the underside of leaves and inside bracts of squares or bolls within the top 10 nodes. This suggests assessment of mealybug on these plant parts may give reliable estimations in the field. Volunteer cotton in a field can be a source of mealybug within the crop. Volunteer cotton grows earlier than cultivated cotton and therefore attracts overwintering mealybug populations in the field (on the root zone of weed hosts or under the soil) and later disperses these to nearby cotton. Checking volunteer and adjacent cotton will help to detect early infestation in the field. Crop stress, such as waterlogging, may make cotton more susceptible to mealybug, so it is important to include stressed areas when checking e.g. tail drains. Investigate patches of stunted or dead plants. As solenopsis mealybug has a very wide host range, also monitor surrounding vegetation including gardens.

If mealybugs are found, contact: Melina Miles (07) 4688 1369 or Moazzem Khan (07) 4688 1310 to arrange identification and to help track distribution of the species.

**Thresholds**

Damage thresholds have been assessed, however it is important to note that there are no insecticides registered for the control...