

Flea Beetles

Flea beetles are being seen in cotton crops around the Gwydir at the moment and are causing some concern. Flea beetles are usually a transient pest but can persist in seedling crops for a few weeks.

Very little is known about flea beetles. There are currently no thresholds for this pest and any management decisions should be based on damage levels. Under hot dry conditions the impact of flea beetles will be greater.

Generally flea beetles do not tend to cause seedling death but this can occur in some instances. Plant stand losses of 10% or higher would be an indication that control is needed.

Plants that are still actively growing and are not tipped out should recover from any damage and are not likely to require any control measures, particularly if they have true leaves.

Cotyledon stage seedlings can recover from damage if it is not too severe. As a rough guide if 50% of leaf area is damaged there may be some delay in development.

The risk with cotton seedlings and flea beetles is when there is hot weather as well. The damage appears as linear surface feeding patterns and can cause severe moisture loss under hot conditions with wilting and possible death of seedlings. From a distance severely damaged seedlings take on a rust-coloured appearance.

Flea beetles could move into terminals and do some damage on seedlings at the cotyledon stage if the cotyledons have lost attractiveness.

Management decisions regarding flea beetles should be based on monitoring of damage levels in the crop, how the plants are growing and expected weather conditions.

There are currently no products registered for the control of flea beetles. However, broad-spectrum insecticides targeting other pest species such as thrips may also control flea beetles.

Thanks to Lewis Wilson, CSIRO and Dave Murray, QDPI&F for this information.

Cotton Pest Management Guide

The production of the Cotton Pest Management Guide has had some unexpected delays this season. It is currently going to print and will be distributed shortly. I will advertise in Cotton Tales when it is available.

Warning on herbicide use

More than 75 per cent of cotton in the Gwydir Valley is either Roundup Ready® or Roundup Ready Flex® cotton. As Roundup Ready Flex is still in early commercial release then the bulk of this is Roundup Ready® cotton. The over-the-top window for safe application of glyphosate to Roundup Ready® cotton is already closed for many crops. There is also still a fair proportion of conventional cotton in the Gwydir this season.

While the percentage of Roundup Ready Flex® cotton this season is still very small I would like to urge growers using this technology to take care when applying glyphosate later in the season as drift onto Roundup Ready® or conventional cotton could significantly impact on yield.

With the recent rain, care will also be required when spraying fallow country to ensure that herbicides do not drift and cause damage to susceptible crops or other sensitive areas such as native vegetation or riparian areas.

What can be done?

Growers, agronomists and spray operators need to carefully plan their spray operations to prevent any damage to nearby sensitive crops. Growers should ensure contractors are applying herbicides under appropriate conditions. It is a legal requirement that weather conditions be recorded during any chemical application.

Neighbour notification agreements from Pesticide Application Management Plans (PAMP) can be used to assist growers to manage their spray operations. PAMP's are a legal requirement for the application of Endosulfan and a requirement for any pesticide application for the BMP program.

A PAMP includes making pre-season arrangements with neighbours, consultants and applicators, notification of farm workers, weather monitoring, equipment selection and maintenance, and identifying buffer zones. The PAMP template can be obtained in the Grower's Toolkit Forms section of Cotton Australia's website at <http://www.cottonaustralia.com.au>. Or contact Polly Gibbons on 0408 982 291.