Field Notes
April 21, 2011
Johnny Saichuk

After one of the best starts of our rice season in many years and a relatively uneventful two weeks everything changed abruptly Monday morning when the phone started ringing. Most of the calls involved rice seedlings like those shown at right. We looked at Jazzman, CL111, Cheniere, and the hybrids 745 and 729 all showing similar symptoms. In one field we found a few chinch bugs and a billbug shown on the next page. In another Dr. Hummel found colaspis larvae – also on a following page. All but one field had Command applied to it. Don't get excited there is nothing wrong with the Command application.

In my opinion the primary problem is dehydration. Command plays a role in that the white leaves that are typically associated with its use are weaker than green healthy leaves. In a normal situation plants recover from this without event. However, the wind of the past week literally shredded these weaker leaves causing desiccation of the leaves. Inability to flood because of the wind is aggravating the problem. In some of our verification fields we are on our second flush in as many weeks. When we recommended flushing the first thing the farmer said was, "We just flushed." Yes, and now we have to flush again. Colaspis larvae, chinch bugs and maybe our billbug are contributing factors, but not the primary cause in most instances.

In the photograph on the next page are seedlings pulled from the same field. The seedlings are Jazzman which apparently lacks the vigor of our more conventional varieties because we are getting too many calls about it. The tall seedlings were in the ditches. The most likely explanation for difference that I can come up with is twofold. First, the seedlings in the ditches remained somewhat protected from the wind. Second, there is more moisture in the ditches than in nearby soil 4 inches higher. Even after all of the surface water has drained, subsurface water continues to migrate to the ditches thus they remain moist longer than the nearby surface. The reluctance to flush (which is understandable) is another contributing factor. Even if the roots appear to be in moist soil it is not the same as when the soil is wet at the surface. As soil dries it cracks. These cracks allow air movement and this past week that meant a lot of air movement, much more than normal. Roots dry out even faster than leaves because they lack the waxy cuticle of leaves that protects the leaves from moisture loss and other injury.

It is never simple. Multiple adverse conditions are having an additive effect.

On the next page are photographs of a billbug we found feeding on seedlings in one field. It is slightly smaller than the rice levee billbug, but that could be an environmental effect. Dr. Hummel is going to get them identified. Clearly they were feeding on seedlings as you can see in one of the pictures. The question is, "How much damage were they doing and will they continue to be a problem." My thoughts are that they were an isolated problem and are not likely to become a more serious pest. The other photograph was provided by Dr. Hummel. It is a colaspis grub feeding on the roots of rice. She was able to find them without much difficulty in that field. The seed had been treated with Dermacor which is an excellent rice water weevil and stem borer insecticide, but is weak on colaspis. The only recommendation to be made at this point is to try to establish and maintain a shallow flood. While flooding will not eliminate the problem with colaspis grubs it has been shown to discourage them somewhat.

Above left is the unidentified billbug feeding on the stem of a rice seedling. At right is the same insect in an overall view. Billbugs are also called snout beetles because of the long snout. At the end of this snout are its chewing mouthparts. This is the same set-up the rice water weevil and infamous boll weevil possess.

At right is a photograph provided by Dr. Hummel. The arrow is pointing to a colaspis grub she found feeding on the roots of this plant. Note we are not referring to this as the grape colaspis because technically it is not that insect. They look the same and behave the same in the field even though insect taxonomists tell us they are separate species. I do not know if a common name has been assigned to this one yet. Dr. Hummel has posted more about this insect on her blog at: www.louisianariceinsects.wordpress.com.

The empty gauge at right tells much of the story of the past few weeks. Since planting we have dumped a grand total of .49 inches of rain from our 4 verification fields in south Louisiana.

The field in the background is our best looking field at this point. It is Jupiter that was water seeded and close to pinpoint flooded. These plants were big enough by the time the wind really cranked up to be able to maintain a permanent flood.

All of the problem fields we visited this week were not flooded and could not be flooded under these conditions. Once the wind dies down and plants recover from the abuse fields will look a lot better and progress much better.

I did get one interesting call yesterday. A farmer preparing to spray his own field with his ground rig had filled the tank with enough water to spray a 50 acre field. He had already added some of the herbicides when he noticed the jug he had just emptied into the load was not surfactant, but 2,4-D. Luckily he caught it then. If he had sprayed that field we would have been called out to look at a problem we would never have figured out.

In Barrett Courville's newsletter he mentioned a field of Jupiter mistakenly sprayed with Newpath. These are the types of things that happen when folks are putting in long days and trying to get a lot done in a short time.

Have a Happy Easter.