Field Notes
July 5, 2006
Johnny Saichuk

Last week we were hot and dry and now we are hot and rainy. From last week to this week we have seen a dramatic increase in the amount of sheath blight in our verification fields and have received reports of similar changes from others out scouting fields. In some cases rice was far enough along to stick with our decision not to apply fungicide while in a few others we thought might be in the same category we had to recommend fungicide. Had it remained dry we might have been able to get by without fungicide on about 60% of our verification fields.

On last Wednesday, June 28, we saw a farmer harvesting rice. That is the earliest I have witnessed a rice harvest which in this case was of volunteer rice in what had been a crawfish pond. The legitimate harvest will probably begin toward the end of this week weather permitting. Eddie Eskew, county agent in Jeff Davis parish told us there were several fields of Trenasse drained in anticipation of harvest later this week.

We still recommend draining based on color of grains in the panicles. In our verification fields we examine what we consider to be a representative sample of several panicles from several locations. If the field has a silt loam soil or is well drained or conditions are favorable for rapid drying of the soil we hold water until about two thirds to three quarters of the grains in each of the panicles in the sample are straw colored. On heavy soils or in situations where the field dries poorly or in rainy weather where dry down is likely to be slow we recommend draining when about one half of the grains on each panicle are straw colored. This will range from two to three weeks prior to harvest in most situations.

Not unexpectedly, we are seeing an increase in stink bug pressure and have had to recommend insecticide applications in a few of our earlier verification fields. The rainy weather will influence a couple of things regarding stink bugs. First, it can have an effect on sampling. We have observed sudden drop in numbers in our samples if we get caught by rain. Stink bugs will seek refuge lower in the canopy which causes sweep net samples to provide lower numbers. In cases where we were approaching threshold values we have had to return to the field at another time to verify the samples. The second effect weather can influence is insecticide efficacy. Years ago a friend told me methyl parathion would work to control southern green stink bugs in soybeans even if it rained, but it would work slower. I witnessed this personally on many occasions before we had the pyrethroids. I have also seen the pyrethroids work with very little time (in minutes) between application and a shower. To my knowledge we have very little scientific evidence of this so I cannot recommend one over the other. It is important to follow up on any applications made within an hour or two of a shower to make sure it did not reduce efficacy.

We have also noticed a difference in sampling numbers at different times of the day. When it is especially hot the insects will move lower in the canopy causing sweep net samples to be lower in number than at cooler times. Early in the morning and late in the afternoon usually produce the highest sample numbers. If it is cloudy, but not raining time of day appears to be less critical. Like the case of insecticide efficacy we have little data to support these field observations.

The photograph at left was taken this morning of a Jupiter flag leaf collar. No fungicide has been applied to this field and grain maturity is from milk to soft dough. The symptoms appear to be of collar blast, but this will not be confirmed until we get the sample to a plant pathologist and let them do a "scratch and sniff" test on it. Actually they will scrape the lesion then transfer that to a microscope slide and examine it for the presence of blast fungus spores. If they find none they may place it in a moist chamber and check it again in a few days. Just looking at the lesion and its location if it is not blast it missed a good chance. Jupiter has much better blast resistance than Bengal, but it is by no means totally immune to the disease. This was an isolated plant and not at all indicative of the rest of the field.

The photograph at right was also taken this morning in the same field as the one above. Again this was not common to the field, but presented an opportunity to refresh your memory. The lesions were observed on the flag leaf sheath. A key to the symptom not so easily observed in the photograph is the netted pattern associated with it especially toward the edges of each lesion. The disease is quite common, but rarely causes serious economic injury alone. Most often it contributes to the sum of injury caused by several pathogens present in the field. What is it?

This week's edition was late because of the 4th of July holiday. I hope to be back on schedule next week.