

Extension Cattle Call

Harward Brothers Livestock Market - Turnersburg

July 2018

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FIRE ANTS

Adapted from an article by Dr. Michael Waldvogel, NCSU

The red imported fire ant continues to spread across North Carolina, in part because of favorable climate conditions that aid its natural spread as well as increased residential and industrial development across the state which provides opportunities for fire ants colonies to be moved around the state in infested soil, sod, nursery stock, and other materials. Although fire ant stings are not usually fatal, they are painful. In agricultural areas, fire ant mounds can interfere with the operation of machinery and disrupt harvesting activities. Eradicating fire ants is not practical at this time, but we can manage infestations to reduce the chance of accidental contact with people and livestock.

Adult red imported fire ants are reddish to dark brown. The workers perform different jobs such as tending the queen and “brood”, maintaining the nest, and gathering food. Some of the major workers serve as “soldiers” which protect the colony. At certain times of the years (mostly spring and summer), you will find winged males (which are small and black in color) and winged females (about 1/3 inch long). Fire ant mounds vary in size but are usually in direct proportion to the size of the colony. For example, a mound that is 2 feet in diameter and 18 inches high may contain about 100,000 workers, several hundred winged adults, and one queen. If you break open an active fire ant mound, you typically find the “brood” – the small whitish larvae and pupae. These immature ants eventually develop into workers or winged adults. It is often difficult to distinguish the red imported fire ant from the tropical fire ant and the southern fire ant, which are also found in North Carolina. For positive identification, take a specimen to your county Cooperative Extension Center.

In agricultural settings, red imported fire ants can disrupt field activities by stinging workers (some of whom may be allergic to their stings). In some instances, fire ant mounds may damage harvesting equipment. Livestock injury and crop damage are relatively minor here but can be a problem locally for horses, cattle, sheep, and poultry, particularly during months when young animals are being born. The ants may also damage equipment, by damaging the wiring. Fire ants have a much greater impact on the ornamental plant, sod, and landscaping industries because of problems associated with shipping potentially infested plant material or soil into uninfested areas of the state and the country.

Individual mounds may be treated with a liquid or dust insecticide formulation or with an insecticidal bait. Liquid treatments may be done by rodding the chemical deep into the mound or by drenching the mound. To be effective, the drench must penetrate throughout the mound and contact most of the fire ants in the colony. Ants coming into contact with the drench die soon after. Drenches are the preferred treatment when the risk of human contact with fire ants is high and the fire ant infestation must be eliminated immediately because of the health risks of someone getting stung. Best control results are usually obtained in spring and fall when temperatures are between 70 and 85°F. Control with mound drenches can be more difficult during very hot summer months because the ants often remain deep within their mounds and are hard to reach with liquid insecticides. In the summer, drenches are best done in the morning or evening. For precise chemicals recommended contact your local Cooperative Extension Center.



What Does Your Soil Need for Fall Growth?

Seth Nagy, Livestock Agent, Caldwell County

Soil samples can be taken any time of the year; however, right now soil samples are processed by the NC Department of Agriculture (NCDA) at no-cost to farmers. There is a \$4.00 charge from December to March to process soil samples. The soil test report provides lime and fertilizer recommendations for your fields. The report only recommends lime and fertilizer if it will improve forage growth. So a soil test will help save money and improve forage growth. These are both good things for cattlemen.

The accuracy of the soil test report depends on the quality of the soil sample. It's best to collect samples with a stainless steel or chrome-plated soil probe. This specialty tool makes the soil sampling task easier. Your local County Extension Center has a probe that you can borrow. Put the sample in a CLEAN plastic bucket, as even small amounts of contaminants can affect test results.

Taking a soil test now will give time for the results to come back so amendments can be applied before getting ready for fall growth such as stockpiling fescue or overseeding pastures.

Productive soils are the foundation for good pastures and hay fields. If you have never taken a soil sample contact your county agent to help you. For more information about the NCDA soil testing visit <http://ncagr.gov/agronomi>.

Foothills Forage Tour

Join us for the Foothills Forage Tour on Tuesday, August 28th beginning at 6:00 pm. The tour will be held in Caldwell County we will be touring Ronnie Holman's farm. Ronnie has actively served on the NC Forage & Grasslands Council and is a progressive cattlemen. If you would like more details or would like to attend, please contact your local Extension Agent to register. The event is free, we just want to know you're coming!

Weed of the Month

Morgan Watts, Agriculture Agent, Rowan County

Perilla Mint is listed as one of the most toxic plants for Cattle. Normally cattle will ignore the plant but in late summer and early fall when other grasses and forages are in short supply cattle may forage on them especially when flowering. Dried plants in hay are can be toxic but the biggest concern is fresh plant material. Usually Perilla Mint is found in a semi- shaded area but can be found in any part of the pasture. Late April to early June is the best time to treat for Perilla Mint.

