

Grasshoppers, Blister Beetles Plaguing Drought-Stretched Parts Of Arkansas

RUSSELLVILLE, ARK.

Cattle aren't the only hungry mouths in drought-parched Arkansas: so are grasshoppers and blister beetles.

Exceptional drought covers 10.81 percent of the state, compared with 3.25 percent in the previous week's U.S. Drought Monitor map. The most intense drought covers all of Conway and Perry counties, most of Pope County and parts of Faulkner and a few other counties.

"Blister beetles and grasshoppers are looking for what little green is left here," said Phil Sims, Pope County extension staff chair for the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture. "That means row crops under irrigation."

Sims has seen hordes of blister beetles nearly carpeting row crops; scurrying under short soybean plants in search of food and moisture. Blister beetles are a scourge to some livestock owners – they are toxic to horses.

Grasshoppers are also a problem. Kelly Loftin, extension entomologist for the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture, said he's been fielding questions about grasshoppers for about six weeks now.

"At the University of Arkansas farm at Savoy, grass is sparse," he said. "All the grasshoppers are on the fence line just waiting for the grass to grow. And because it's so dry, fungal pathogens don't do so well, which is limiting natural control of grasshoppers."

They're also harder to kill with pesticides. "The best time to control grasshoppers would be the time period when they're still nymphs and they can't fly long distances," Loftin said. "When they're big adults, they're more mobile and harder to control."

However, nature didn't give grasshoppers all the cards.

"Blister beetle larvae eat grasshopper eggs," he said, adding that the drought-hardened ground has forced the grasshoppers to lay eggs above the soil, leaving them and unprotected.

For more information on coping with drought, visit Arkansas Drought Resources at

<http://arkansasdroughtresourcecenter.wordpress.com/> or the shortlink, <http://wp.me/2zudK>, or contact your county extension office. Δ

