

LOST PINES COUNTY AGRICULTURE NEWSLETTER

June 2026



NEW WORLD SCREWWORM COLLECTION KITS AVAILABLE

Dakota Kempken

Unfortunately, New World Screwworms (NWS) have inevitably reached Texas. With this new development, it is imperative that pet owners, livestock producers, and wildlife managers stay vigilant and regularly monitor the health of their animals. Screwworm flies will lay their eggs in living tissue, and the maggots will then feed on that living tissue. Because of that, any open wound can potentially become susceptible to screwworms. Collection kits are now available at the Extension Office for collection and submission to Texas Animal Health Commission. If you even suspect NWS to be present in an animal, I highly encourage you to come grab a kit and reach out to Texas Animal Health Commission.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU SUSPECT NEW WORLD SCREWORM IN YOUR HERD

Thomas Hairgrove et al.

If New World screwworm (NWS) is suspected in livestock, immediate action is critical to prevent further spread and protect animal health. This guide outlines the steps to take if NWS is suspected, starting with the core response approach: Inspect. Collect. Protect.

Immediate Actions

If screwworm infestation is suspected:

1. Contact authorities:
 - a. Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC) for livestock and pets: 800-550-8242
 - b. Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) for wildlife: 512-389-4505
2. Notify the animals' private veterinarian.
3. Do not delay reporting. Early detection limits spread and minimizes long-term consequences.

Inspect

It is vital to frequently monitor livestock and look for signs of NWS, such as:

- The smell of rotting tissue
- Visible burrowing larvae
- Sickly looking wounds on both livestock and wildlife.

Suspected cases should be reported even if unsure.

Collect

If NWS is suspected, report it to the Texas Animal Health Commission. Contact a local veterinarian and/or AgriLife Extension County agent. Follow the instructions of the veterinarian or animal health professional on next steps.

Protect

Work with a veterinarian for a treatment plan for the affected animal and the rest of the herd. Always follow the veterinarian's treatment plan. Potential options can include:

- Topical treatments:
 - Permethrin sprays: Over-the-counter; kill and repel flies
 - Permethrin ear tags: Add protection during active months.
- Systemic treatment:
 - Coumaphos: Requires a certified applicator license due to toxicity. Applied topically but works systemically.
- Wound care:
 - Clean wounds thoroughly and apply disinfectant.

- Cover if possible during fly season.
- Monitor healing daily.

Why Reporting Matters

- Early detection enables fast containment.
- Delays in reporting could allow widespread infestation.
- While temporary movement restrictions may occur, long-term industry impact from established populations would be far worse.

TEXAS ANIMAL HEALTH COMMISSION CONTACT INFORMATION

TAHC has two offices that service Bastrop County. For any questions or to submit screwworm samples, contact one of the two locations below:

- Central office
 - 2105 Kramer Ln. Austin
 - 512-719-0700
- Giddings office
 - 152 Industrial Park rd. Giddings
 - 979-212-5440

THE PASTURE MEALYBUG: A NEW INVASIVE PEST OF PASTURES AND HAYFIELDS IN TEXAS

Since April 2025, southern Texas pasture and hay producers have been reporting problems in their fields. These fields show grass patches becoming brown or necrotic, or patches that are completely dead. There have been extreme cases where entire fields show symptoms of grass desiccation. Originally, it was presumed that symptoms were caused by the Rhodes grass mealybug (*Antonina graminis*), which has been reported in the U.S. since 1942. However, further investigations have confirmed the pasture mealybug (*Heliococcus summervillei*) is the species associated with the symptoms and cases previously mentioned.

This insect is an introduced pest and a newly recorded species in the United States. Although it is a new record for the continent, researchers suspect that the insect may have been introduced before 2022. This pest was first described in Australia in

1928, and the first detection of this species in the Western Hemisphere occurred in the Caribbean between 2019 and 2020.

Identification and Biology

Adult female mealybugs are 2 to 5 millimeters (mm) long and oval with a posterior, short anal tube. The insect body is usually covered with a waxy coat, giving it a white or “mealy” appearance. Older pasture mealybugs have fine hair, about the length of the width of their bodies. These extend out to all sides. The youngest nymphs are very small (less than 1 mm in length) and can only be seen with a magnifier. They might be found at the base of the plant and roots on feeding sites. Nymphs are the damaging stage of the pest. The adults do not feed. The pasture mealybug is mobile in all life stages and might be found at or below the soil surface or under dried cow patties. Pasture mealybugs are not necessarily gregarious and may be found either in larger groups or individually on leaves.

The pasture mealybug reproduces sexually, with both males and females passing through four instars. Males pupate after the third instar and emerge as winged adults, which are most abundant during the peak summer breeding season. Mating tends to occur in the dense thatch layer of summer pastures. The bodies of mature mated females turn pink in color. Females can produce nearly 100 offspring within 24 hours.

Under laboratory conditions, the average life cycle of females is 45 to 47 days, though some may live up to 100 days. Males have a shorter life cycle of 29 to 33 days. Females can persist in the field year-long by overwintering in the soil, where they survive under dry and/or cold temperatures.

The pasture mealybug undergoes seasonal variations in intensity or population increases, depending on the weather and pasture management. It has been noted that high humidity, high temperatures, and rain events over the growing season are favorable conditions for the pest to increase in population size and damage potential.

Damage and Symptoms

While adult pasture mealybugs do not feed, immature pasture mealybugs feed by sucking plant sap with piercing/sucking mouthparts and excrete sugary substances called honeydew, over the leaves. This substance promotes the growth of sooty-mold fungi, which blocks photosynthesis. Most of the damage to the grass is caused by the saliva injected into the plant, which is toxic to the grass. As a result, the plants



Adult female pasture mealybug surrounded by nymphs

become weakened and more susceptible to secondary infections by plant pathogens such as *Fusarium*. The combination of the mealybug feeding and secondary infection of plant pathogens results in a condition known as “pasture dieback,” which kills grasses and is currently affecting millions of hectares of highly productive grazing land across parts of Australia. Even low numbers of mealybugs may result in pasture dieback under the right conditions. Mealybug symptoms can appear within a week of infestation, but it may take longer for the grass to die. The early plant symptomology of grass affected by mealybug feeding is yellowing and discoloration, followed by purpling or reddening of the leaves. Plants may look stunted and show drought stress even after a rainfall event and generally have a poorly developed root system. These symptoms are noted first in old leaves, starting from the tip and moving down the leaf blade in a die-back progression. Plants experiencing dieback will senesce prematurely, leading to infections of opportunistic pathogens that eventually cause the plants to die.

Scouting and Monitoring



Pasture mealybugs with human fingers for scale

Inspect for pasture mealybugs as part of a regular pasture pest scouting program. Currently, there is no standardized protocol to scout for pasture mealybugs. However, the pasture mealybug can be found on grass leaves, at the base of the plants, over the soil, in leaf litter, below the soil, and below cow patties. Closely inspect areas where the grass is yellowed or reddened. Field areas where grass is left unmanaged—like fence lines, ungrazed patches, and roadsides—tend to grow long and thick, making them more vulnerable to mealybug infestations. Inspect the foliage and stems throughout the plant and under the thatch. Most pasture mealybugs will reside on the grass blades, followed by the stem and roots in the summer. Look for fluffy white, waxy or “fuzzy” insects.

There are other insects that produce white, waxy, coverings, but if infested plants appear unhealthy, the insect is probably the pasture mealybug and further investigation is warranted. Specimens can be collected for species verification by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service.

If an infestation is suspected, it is a good idea to mark that location and monitor it for spread and plant health decline.

Management

Currently, there are no reliable and tested management strategies for pasture mealybug in Texas. Most of the little information available is from Australia, which may not translate to Texas production practices. There is a great deal of research that is needed.

Australian researchers are recommending planting grasses that are less susceptible to pasture mealybug. Currently, it is unknown which grasses utilized in Texas may prove to be less susceptible.

Nitrogen fertilization of affected areas has been shown to exacerbate the dieback condition. Thus, avoiding excessive nitrogen fertilization in infested pastures may aid in slowing pasture mealybug population growth. However, in Australia, researchers have observed that phosphorus fertilization may help grass tolerate pasture mealybug better by improving root growth and grass recovery.

Grazing/cutting the pasture has been recommended in cases where the pasture mealybug is established. Grazing or cutting the pasture reduces areas of thick-growing grass, creating unfavorable conditions for the pest to expand. It also enhances nutrient uptake for grass regrowth and helps to improve the tolerance of plants against mealybug feeding. Additionally, in pastures heavily infested with pasture mealybug, it may be advisable to harvest early before the grass dies to preserve hay quality. The direct effect of grazing on reducing pasture mealybug populations is uncertain.

Although pasture mealybug may be dispersed by wind, movement on machinery, cattle, or on clothing from infested pastures to uninfested pastures is a great concern. It is a good idea to clean farm equipment operating in an infested pasture before operating that machinery in a clean pasture. Pressure washing equipment is the best method, but sweeping equipment is an alternative where washing is not possible.

Over time, pasture mealybugs may be controlled by populations of naturally occurring or introduced beneficial arthropods. It is advisable to avoid using broad-spectrum insecticides, such as pyrethroids, in pastures infested with pasture mealybug. Additionally, fire ants are known to tend and protect many soft-bodied insects, such as mealybugs, from predators and, thus, may exacerbate mealybug infestations.

There are currently no labeled insecticides to specifically control the pasture mealybug. Pyrethroid insecticides are labeled to control different mealybug species in pastures. However, the use of broad-spectrum insecticides like pyrethroids is not recommended. Recent data collected by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service suggests pyrethroids are ineffective and may make the mealybug population worse by eliminating natural enemies. Research to identify effective insecticides, their timing, and use is underway. Texas A&M AgriLife Extension and the Texas

Department of Agriculture are working to get Special Local Needs labels for promising insecticides.

Reporting Infested Pastures and Turf

It is important to understand the geographic range of the current pasture mealybug infestation. Additionally, scientists are actively searching for locations to conduct research on this pest. **If pasture mealybugs are found in a pasture**, please contact one of the following:

- Stephen Biles, Extension Program Specialist-IPM, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service (stephen.biles@ag.tamu.edu)
- Danielle Sekula, Extension Program Specialist-IPM, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service (danielle.sekula@ag.tamu.edu)
- José Santiago-González, Assistant Professor & Extension Entomologist, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service (j.santiagogonzalez@ag.tamu.edu)
- David Kerns, Professor & Extension Entomologist, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service (david.kerns@ag.tamu.edu).

If pasture mealybugs are found infesting turf, please contact Caixing Xiong, Assistant Research Scientist, Department of Entomology, Texas A&M University (caixing.xiong@ag.tamu.edu).

WEED OF THE MONTH: SWITCHGRASS

Switchgrass is a warm season native grass found all throughout Bastrop County that can dominate native landscapes. This species of bunch grass is famously massive in size and aggressive for native species. Leaf blades can grow up to 2 ft long, and the plant itself can reach up to 6 ft in height. Leaves start out bluish green in color and turn yellow during the fall season. The ligules (where the blade connects to the stem) form a dense ring of hairs. Flowers and seedheads form a cone shape with



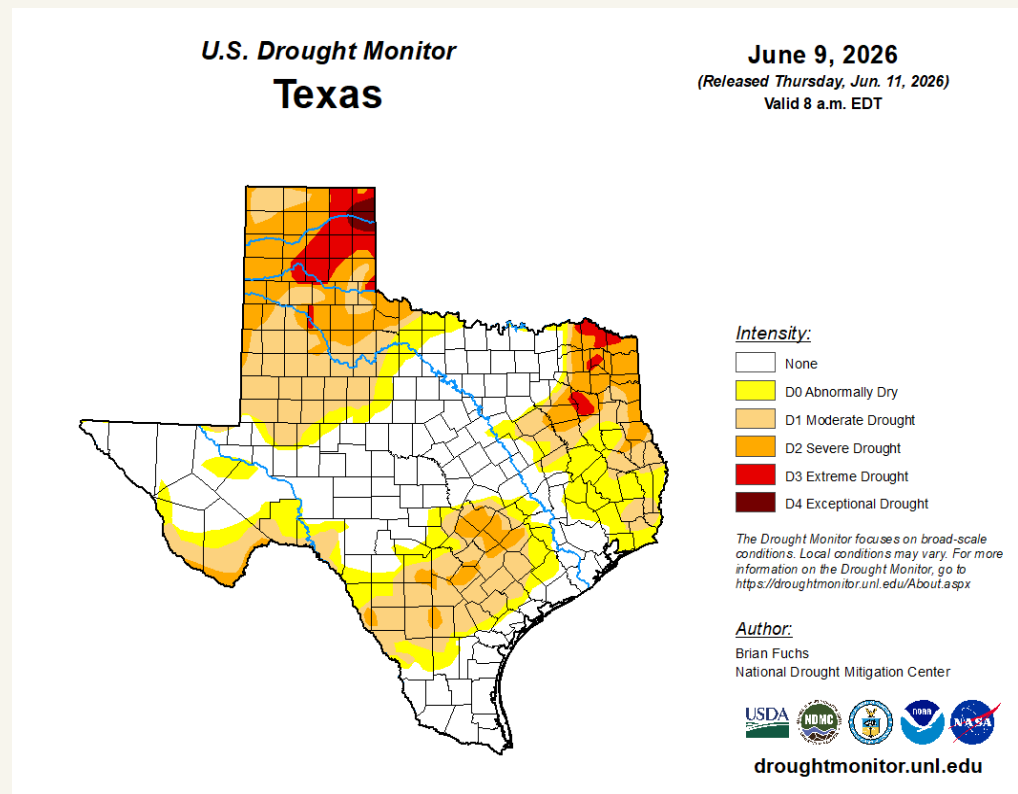
purplish spikelets. Additionally, switchgrass frequently spreads via rhizome, often creating large clumps of very large grasses. Fun fact: Switchgrass, along with other tall grasses like big bluestem and Indiangrass, can be attributed to the Great Plains' infamy during westward expansion for being "high enough to hide cattle and long

enough to tie in a knot around a horse's back." This also made it incredibly easy for

early settlers unfamiliar with the land to get lost in the sea of grass if they stray too far from wagon trails or get disoriented in the grass.

Switchgrass, especially the Alamo variety frequently planted, are a good forage option for livestock due to their high palatability and crude protein when young. However it can quickly become a problem as it matures, as older parts of the plant take on an almost woody texture and quickly become unpalatable. If left untouched, it can quickly become the dominant forage grass on the landscape. However, because of its large size and growth pattern, it makes for excellent nesting space for ground nesting birds and the seeds make for good forage.

TEXAS DROUGHT MONITOR UPDATE



Giddings Livestock Commission – June 15th

Weight	Steers		Heifers	
	Avg	High	Avg	High
150 – 300	\$552	\$690	\$512	\$680
300 – 400	\$556	\$650	\$494	\$600
400 – 500	\$488	\$550	\$438	\$585
500 – 600	\$431	\$545	\$397	\$495
600 – 700	\$388	\$437.50	\$355	\$410
700 – 800	\$330	\$385	\$337	\$370
Packer bulls				
	Top	\$210 – 227		
	Medium	\$185 – 200		
Stocker Females				
	Stocker pairs	\$3,200 – 6,300		
	Bred cows	\$1,800 – 4,150		
Packer Cows				
	Top	\$170 – 190		
	Medium	\$150 – 165		
	Thin	\$100 – 145		

Lockhart Auction – June 11th

Weight	Steers	Heifers
<300	\$480 – 865	\$440 – 840
300 – 400	\$430 – 645	\$390 – 595
400 – 500	\$385 – 540	\$320 – 535
>500	\$255 – 475	\$265 – 445
	Packer Cows	\$120 – 186
	Packer Bulls	\$172 – 210
	Stocker Cows	\$1,900 – 3,350
	Cow/Calf Pairs	\$1,950 – 4,550

Gonzales Livestock Market – May 9th

Weight	Steers	Heifers
150 – 300	\$425 – 860	\$375 – 710
300 – 400	\$420 – 645	\$350 – 460
400 – 500	\$370 – 525	\$320 – 465
500 – 600	\$350 – 465	\$315 – 425
600 – 700	\$310 – 395	\$335 – 345
700 – 800	\$315 – 345	
	Yearling Bulls	\$265 – 325
	Stocker Cows	\$1,800 – 4,100
	Pairs	\$1,800 – 4,800

NEW WORLD SCREWWORM SITUATION UPDATE ON JUNE 23rd

New World Screwworms have made it to Texas, and livestock producers, wildlife managers, and pet owners need to be aware of the current situation regarding their spread along with signs of infestation, what to do if screwworms are found, and how to prevent infestation. Join us over the lunch hour on Tuesday, June 23rd for a FREE, online situation update from Texas Animal Health Commission and AgriLife Extension. This update is open to livestock producers and stakeholders, wildlife managers, and the general public interested and invested in controlling NWS, and will be hosted on Microsoft Teams from 12PM to 1PM. The registration and meeting link can be found below, just click the hyperlink below and save it to your calendar or somewhere accessible to join the webinar. You can also register and attend by scanning the QR code below with your smart phone's camera.

[Register and join the webinar here:](#)

Or

SCAN BELOW WITH YOUR SMART PHONE

