



Agri-News

June 22, 2009

Dutch Elm Disease Awareness Week

Dutch Elm Disease (DED) Awareness Week is recognized annually throughout Alberta. The intent is to raise awareness on what DED is, the importance of elm trees to our communities, and that DED can be prevented. This year, **DED Awareness Week is June 22 to 28.**

An elm inventory taken in 1999 showed that there are a total of 219,334 elms growing in Alberta's urban communities. The value of these elm trees is \$634 million. It is estimated that equal amounts of elms grow in the rural areas, raising the total value to well over a billion dollars. At present, Alberta has the largest DED-free American elm stands in the world, and this valuable resource is worth protecting.

DED is caused by a fungus that clogs an elm tree's water conducting system, causing the tree to die. The fungus is primarily spread from one elm tree to another by two species of beetles: the smaller European and the native elm bark beetle. The beetles are attracted to weak and dying trees that serve as breeding sites for the beetles. Once the beetles have pupated and turned into adults, they leave the brood gallery and fly to healthy elms to feed, transporting the fungus on their bodies from one tree to the next.

Monitoring for these beetles, done annually throughout the province, is one way of protecting Alberta's elm tree population.

Also, the elm tree pruning ban in Alberta is now in effect. To reduce the risk of DED, pruning of elm trees is prohibited throughout Alberta from April 1 to September 30 each year. Fresh cuts from pruning attract the beetles that can spread the disease and increase the chance of an infection. This ban period is intended to coincide with the period during which elm bark beetles are most active. Pruning of dead and dying elm branches is encouraged from October 1 to March 31. This

helps to reduce beetle breeding habitat. Prompt and proper disposal of the pruned elm wood is essential to keep the vectors and disease from spreading.

Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development's website has additional information on DED and on the pruning precautions and pruning bans in place to help prevent the spread of DED to Alberta's elms. For more information on DED and on this year's DED Awareness Week, visit the website at www.agriculture.alberta.ca/ded

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Dutch Elm Disease Prevention: What You Can Do

Every Albertan can lend a helping hand in saving the province's elm trees. To start with, take preventative measures by keeping your elm trees healthy, vigorous and properly pruned.

Elms should be well watered from April to mid-August. Watering should be stopped mid-August and then followed by a good soaking or two before freeze-up. This allows the trees to harden off for the winter.

Dead branches and trees that provide beetle habitat should be removed. Since elm bark beetles are attracted to fresh tree wounds, pruning should only be done between October 1 to March 31. At this time, these beetles that spreads Dutch elm disease are not in their active stage.

It is important to dispose of all elm wood by taking it to the local landfill or by burning, burying or chipping it. Chips should be no greater than 2.5cm (1 inch). Elm wood provides ideal breeding sites for the tiny elm bark beetle.

A great help in any prevention program is knowing what to look for. Be sure to learn how to identify the signs of Dutch elm disease and beetle activity. If you notice any signs, report them to the nearest DED hotline or to your community.

Do

- be aware of DED and its symptoms
- immediately report infected trees
- burn, bury or chip elm wood must be immediately – chips should be no greater than 2.5cm (1 inch)
- keep elm trees healthy by keeping trees well watered
- prune dead wood from your elm trees between October 1 and March 31.

Do Not

- bring elm firewood or logs into Alberta as it could be carrying the elm bark beetles and/or fungus
- transport or store elm wood within Alberta (stored firewood provides a perfect breeding area for the elm bark beetles)
- prune elms between April 1 and September 30, when elm bark beetles are active and attracted to fresh wounds

Farmers Hope Crops Avoid Damage as Hail Season Approaches

Alberta producers have suffered record levels of crop damage due to severe hail storms during the past two years. Agriculture Financial Services Corporation (AFSC), the provincial Crown Corporation that provides the majority of hail insurance in Alberta, advises farmers to make insurance decisions early.

“Last year was the worst we've seen in our 71 years as a public hail insurer. We paid out \$73.5 million in claims through our Straight Hail program - almost doubling the record \$40 million the year before,” says Gilbert Goudreau, provincial adjusting manager with AFSC.

“While Environment Canada reported 66 severe hail storms last year, down from a record 89 the year before, many storms last summer were more intense and widespread as they tracked across the province. We had 563 different areas of the province report hail, compared to about 300 areas in a normal year.”

The hardest hit regions in 2008 were southern Alberta, and a corridor along the Queen Elizabeth II Highway between Edmonton and Calgary.

“It's impossible to predict what will happen this summer,” says Dan Kulak, an Environment Canada meteorologist in Edmonton. “It's been a very dry spring across most of Alberta, but June is a critical month that often sets up the summer for hail depending on how much rain falls. If we get some real soakers, it can fuel hail storms in July, which is typically when we see the most hail activity.”

In the last two years May and June have also been busy months for hail, with a number of early storms catching farmers off guard. “We're urging producers to make their hail insurance decisions as early as possible this year,” says Goudreau. “The number of producers calling us to buy hail insurance after their crops have already been hit has doubled. It's unfortunate because we have to reject them for coverage if the damage on uninsured crops exceeds 25 per cent, or if the damage is too difficult to accurately assess at such an early stage of plant growth.

“In some cases, we can defer assessment of the crop until mid-July when it's more mature. But in the meantime, if more hail rolls through and does 25 per cent damage or more, they're stuck without coverage for the whole season.” He adds crops with less than 25 per cent damage can be insured, but they're charged a deductible to cover the previous hail damage.

Farmers play a risky game by waiting too long to buy their hail insurance, says Goudreau. “If they're thinking about insuring their crops, we recommend doing it as soon as the plants emerge. It doesn't save any money to wait a few weeks. You pay the same amount for hail insurance whether you start coverage in June, July or August.”

Despite back-to-back years of record hail claims in Alberta, producers across the province won't see their hail rates increase by more than two percentage points this year, says Avery Cook, manager of Actuarial Services and Program Readiness at AFSC. “We limit base rate increases to two percentage points every year to keep them stable and minimize the impact of heavy hail years like the ones we've seen lately.

“We’re able to do this because we take a long-term approach to managing rates. AFSC has been in the hail insurance business for 71 years, so we’re able to calculate rates using 25 years of hail data – one of the longest time frames in the industry – instead of the more common 10-to-15-year models.”

Cook says that longer time period spreads the impact of record losses over several years of premiums. “So producers aren’t paying it all back the next year, and it’s easier to deal with. If we used a 10- or 15-year model and removed our limit on rate increases, producers would be paying much higher rates this year,” he explains.

Hail rates are set at a township level, based primarily on the hail experience of each township and the surrounding eight townships. Less than 10 per cent of Alberta’s 4,140 townships will see a base rate increase of two percentage points. About 70 per cent will see an increase of one percentage point. More than 20 per cent will actually see their hail rates fall by one percentage point or stay the same. “If your rate is five per cent, your hail insurance will cost \$5 for every \$100 of coverage,” explains Cook, adding that an adjustment is made for crops such as canola that are more prone to hail damage.

“The Straight Hail program is funded entirely by premiums. As a Crown Corporation, we set hail rates to cover crop losses, and to break even. There’s no profit factored in.”

Producers can access Straight Hail coverage at any time but it doesn’t come into effect until noon the following day. For more information, producers can contact their local AFSC hail agent or insurance office, or the AFSC Call Centre at 1-888-786-7475.

Contact: AFSC Call Centre
1-888-786-7475

War on Weeds

Despite the cool spring and slow plant growth, weeds are growing and germinating. Once again, crop producers have to wage war against yield-sapping weeds.

“It’s probably a good time to review the process of weed assessment and control,” says Harry Brook, crop specialist with Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development, Stettler. “One of the best uses of time and effort is scouting your fields. A regular field walk helps keep you informed as to what is going on in the field. For example, if the crop emerges before the weeds, impact of weeds on yield is greatly reduced. This only emphasizes the importance of controlling weeds as early as possible so they can’t rob the crop of nutrients, moisture and yield. It demonstrates the principle of the critical weed control period. The critical weed control period is the time when weed growth and competition can seriously damage your crop’s yield. Weeds emerging before or after this period will not have an appreciable effect on crop yield. As it turns out, the time of weed emergence relative to the crop is more important than the density of weed population.”

Another issue to consider is the competitive nature of the crop being grown. Twenty years ago, canola was not a very competitive crop, and it was often seeded on the cleanest land. Now, with hybrid canola and more vigorous genetics, canola is used as a cleanup crop and is rated the second most competitive crop, behind barley. Barley is still Alberta’s most competitive crop, as long as a competitive variety is chosen. Semi-dwarf barleys are less competitive than regular barleys. Heavier seeding rates always increase the crop’s competitive nature against weeds, as thin crops allow light to hit the ground which stimulates more weed growth.

“Once you’ve field scouted and identified the weed problem you have to assess the degree of threat they represent,” says Brook. “An example of an early, non-yield threatening weed is whitlow grass. It is a very slow growing, small plant that bolts and goes to seed, usually before seeding. It is not a threat to the crop except indirectly, through the use of spring moisture. If other weedy plants are a threat to yield, in sufficient numbers, then appropriate control measures can be chosen.”

Using herbicide is the most common control measure, but there are others. Under certain circumstance, cropping systems or crop types (row crops), cultivation is still a valid way to kill weeds. Biological controls that can target specific problem weeds are being developed and registered. A crop rotation with a mix of spring- and fall-seeded crops can also be effective in managing weed populations. Weeds must be immature enough to be controlled by the method chosen. Once weeds are making seed, the damage to crop yield has been done and you end up with more weed seeds in the soil.

There is a selection of herbicides available for weed control or suppression of many weeds. In almost all cases, the best results come from spraying early, before the weeds are competitive with the crop. A comprehensive list of herbicides with up-to-date information is available in *Crop Protection 2009* (Blue Book), a dependable resource that can help producers make decisions concerning herbicides, pesticides and fungicides controls. The Blue Book is available from Alberta Agriculture’s Publication Office by calling toll-free 1-800-292-5697. It can also be ordered on-line at www.agriculture.alberta.ca/publications. The cost of the Blue Book is \$12, plus GST, plus shipping and handling.

“After spraying, scout the field again to assess the success of the control measure,” says Brook. “This gives you information on how effective the control measure was, what other problems may be arising in the field and how the crop is developing. Think of it as quality time with your crop. It avoids any nasty surprises that can lead to a crisis response.”

“Weeds are always going to be with us. With regular field scouting and assessment, you can deal with these small problems before they become large, costly problems. It’s a case of an ounce of prevention being better than a pound of cure.”

Contact: Harry Brook
310-FARM (3276)

News from the North American Farmers' Direct Marketing Association

The North American Farmers' Direct Marketing Association (NAFDMA) is an international association for farm direct marketers and ag-tourism operators. NAFDMA has been in operation for 24 years. The NAFDMA convention is the association's flagship. Every winter the convention rotates around North America with the next convention being held in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, on February 5 to 12, 2010. It attracts farm direct marketers from around the world who are looking to innovate and diversify their businesses.

"In addition to planning the 2010 convention, NAFDMA has coordinated yet another amazing Advanced Learning Retreat," says Kerry Engel, Alberta representative on the NAFDMA Board of Directors. "Maybe this should be the year that you take in one of the NAFDMA events.

"The 2010 Advanced Learning Retreat is being held at Huber's Orchards and Winery, Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Huber's is one of the most complete farms associated with NAFDMA. It will be an incredible learning experience to be able to see how they integrate it all into one business. This is the place to visit before developing a farm's long range plan."

A visit to Huber's will give farmers a chance to visually evaluate options. Huber's Orchards and Winery has:

- over 550 acres of tree fruit, small fruit, vegetables, pumpkins, vineyards and Christmas trees
- a Family Farm Park including animals, pedal carts, mountain slide, gemstone mining, tile, rope, bamboo and corn mazes, and other activities
- a farm market featuring fresh local produce and outstanding bakery
- a complete and full service winery with all stages of production and wine making (loft tasting bar and gift shoppe, Starlight distillery, Starlight café)
- cheese shoppe and ice cream factory
- Plantation Hall banquet facility

Direct marketers in Alberta who are interested in becoming NAFDMA members can check out the membership page on NAFDMA's website at www.nafdma.com. The site includes access to the audio recordings from the 2009 conference in Savannah, Georgia. Registration details can also be found on the NAFDMA site.

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Agri-News Briefs

Agtech Centre Field Day

The Agtech Centre in Lethbridge is hosting a field day focusing on research and technology, on June 25, 2009, from 9:30 a.m. until 3:30 p.m. Michael Bevans, project manager, Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development, states that a lot of work has been done on the farm this year to demonstrate new technology, from using equipment that allows producers to decide where to place the fertilizer in reference to the seed (with the seed and fertilizer to the side and below the seed) and at precise depths, to computer systems that can record what was seeded where and how. The field day will give farmers the chance to see first-hand the effect of the different fertilizer placements relative to the seed placement on three different crops (barley, wheat, and canola). There will also be discussion on the documentation, record keeping and other capabilities of the latest software/technology such as yield results across an entire field, variable rate fertilizer application, variable rate pesticide application and moisture control technology for forage harvesters. For further information, contact Bevans at 403-329-1212 or e-mail: michael.bevans@gov.ab.ca

2009 Diagnostic Field School

The Southern Applied Research Association (SARA) is holding the 2009 Diagnostic Field School just outside of Lethbridge on July 7, 8 and 9, 2009. The one-day school is being held on three consecutive days. The agenda for each day includes presentations on:

- crop staging
- calculating plant density
- winter barley, triticale and pulses
- biological controls for sclerotinia and clubroot
- neutraceutical vaccine for malaria
- soil sampling methods
- interpreting lab results
- nutrient management plans
- precision tools for on-farm research

There is also an in-field tradeshow that attendees will have a chance to enjoy during lunch. Field school registration fee is

\$110.25 for SARA members and \$136.50 for non-members. CCA and Pesticide Applicator credits are available. Those interested in attending need to indicate which day they would like to attend. To register, contact Jolayne Manning at 403-381-5929. The Diagnostic Field School is part of the SARA Research and Development Site, located one mile east of Lethbridge on the jail road. The 50-acre site is leased from Lethbridge College and is used for research and demonstrations.

Bow Island Field Day

A Field Day at the Bow Island Substation will be hosted by Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development, Zone 1 Alberta Pulse Growers Commission, Alberta Soft Wheat Producers Commission and Reduced Tillage Linkages on July 22, 2009. Research issues being discussed include:

- special crops research trials - Dr. Manjula Bandara, special crops research scientist
- irrigation management research - Ted Harms, soil and water specialist
- insect management research - Scott Meers, insect management specialist
- irrigated crop agronomy research and dryland crop rotations - Dr. Ross McKenzie, agronomy research scientist

There is no charge; however, registration for this tour would be appreciated so lunch arrangements can be made. To register, contact Judy Chow at 403-381-5170 in Lethbridge or by e-mail at judy.chow@gov.ab.ca

There will be several off-site tours in the afternoon to view either dryland or irrigated crop research trials, for those interested. Participants are asked to meet at the Substation Field Building at 9:00 a.m. on July 22. To get to the substation, travel west from Bow Island on Highway #3 for about 3 km, turn south on Secondary Highway #879 (Foremost Highway) for about 10 km. Just after the Spitz Sunflower Plant, is the Substation Building (White Trailers) on the west side of the highway. For further information contact Ross McKenzie, Agronomy Research Scientist at 403-381-5842 or Don Wentz with Reduced Tillage Linkages at 403-381-5845.