



Agri-News

July 27, 2009

Stripe Rust Alert for Southern Alberta Wheat

Stripe rust is a significant disease of both wheat and barley world-wide. Stripe rust has been in Alberta for decades; however, since 2003, the incidence and severity has increased dramatically in wheat some years. The disease is caused by the fungus *Puccinia striiformis tritici*. Infections were first observed in the Lethbridge winter wheat nurseries on June 30, 2009 and conditions have favoured secondary infection. Infections were noted on the spring wheat nurseries on July 3, 2009. The rainfall on July 13, 2009, in southern Alberta favours continued sporulation and secondary infection.

This fungus can over-winter in Alberta. However, the greatest risk is from air-borne spores carried from wheat producing regions in the U.S. Upon landing on a suitable wheat plant, the spores produce fungal strands which grow beneath the leaf surface only to re-emerge within 10 days as a distinctive raised orange or yellow stripe on the surface of the leaf. If ideal conditions persist, the fungus consumes the leaf and the released spores re-infect other portions of the plant and ultimately the entire crop. In the end, the field takes on an orange shade prior to the release of trillions of spores onto crops both near and far. Once the leaves lose their photosynthetic capacity, the grain fills poorly and shrivelled kernels result in yield reductions as high as 30 per cent.

Generally, this disease prefers cool temperatures, but strains do occur that are less sensitive to temperature. The rainfall experienced in Lethbridge combined with cool days and cold nights have allowed the disease to progress with a number of repeating cycles since first observed on June 30.

There are a number of spring and winter wheat varieties that offer very good resistance to stripe rust. Radiant, the most commonly grown winter wheat in the Lethbridge region, has adequate stripe resistance whereas the number two variety, Bellatrix, is very susceptible.

With the large number of spring wheat varieties available to producers, the best course of action is to consult the seed guide to determine variety susceptibility. Rust may still occur on these varieties but should not require protection with a fungicide. For some varieties, the stripe rust reaction is not known. A number of effective fungicides are available but label

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directions should be followed in terms of timing for effective control and preharvest interval, following diligent crop scouting. Stripe rust generally favours thick stands of wheat where the dew will persist on the lower leaves for a long period.

Producers who are considering a fungicide application can visit the online selector on Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development's website at www.agriculture.alberta.ca/pesticide

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Alberta Tame Pasture Scorecard

Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development's pasture specialists have developed an Alberta Tame Pasture Scorecard. The scorecard is a tool that will help producers assess their pastures and provide tips on pasture management.

Regular pasture assessments monitor pasture performance. Assessments record changes on pastures due to management, weather, and growing conditions.

"Pasture assessment identifies strengths and weaknesses in the pasture management system," says Grant Lastiwka, P. Ag., forage/grazing/beef specialist with Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development, Olds. "Producers can capitalize on management strengths to maximize forage production. Once problem areas are identified, it is possible to target management to produce specific improvements. When resources are limited, targeting management to areas that will produce the greatest return is critical. Regular pasture assessments help optimize forage production and evaluate the sustainability of pasture management systems."

Producers can use the Alberta Tame Pasture Scorecard to visually assess their pastures and record their observations for future monitoring. The scorecard uses key indicators and descriptions to measure pasture vigour and productivity.

Indicators such as plant population, plant density, plant vigour, ground cover, soil damage, and severity and uniformity of use are assessed and given a ranking of low, moderate or high.

Each indicator looks at a key component of a healthy, productive tame pasture. For example, plant population looks at the proportion of total plant population made up of productive, well-adapted, palatable forage plants.

"The Alberta Tame Pasture Scorecard is quick and easy to use," says Lastiwka. "Producers can complete the assessment with

just the scorecard and a pencil. No special training is required. Instructions on how to use the scorecard in the field, and a list of management practices that can be used to improve tame pasture are included with the scorecard. Rate each indicator by circling the rank that best describes pasture condition. Note those that need improvement and consider management options that might help. It is recommended to monitor pastures during the growing season at about the same time each year. This makes it easier to follow changes in indicators over time.

"Divide the farm into several pastures or paddocks, based on management, forage type, soils or timing of use. A separate assessment should be done for each pasture or paddock, since different sites may need different management. Each assessment should be based on an average of at least three sites within the paddock. Avoid areas near water, trees and other places where animals concentrate. Consider assessing these areas separately."

The Alberta Tame Pasture Scorecard assessment is based on individual producer's knowledge and understanding of their pastures. The assessment is subjective, so it's useful if the same person assesses all the pastures on the farm. Indicator scores do not represent an absolute value or measure. While high scores are good, all pastures have opportunities for improvement.

"Pasture assessments allow producers to look closely at their pastures and identify specific areas where management improvements may be profitable and effective," says Lastiwka. "Rather than a shotgun approach, they allow targeted, specific management. For example, if a pasture has low forage production because the plant species present are not adapted for high production, applying fertility will improve production, but introducing more productive forage species may have a much greater impact."

The Alberta Tame Pasture Scorecard (Agdex 130/10-1) is available free of charge by contacting Alberta Agriculture's Publications Office at 780-427-0391 in the Edmonton area or toll free at 1-800-292-5697. A copy can also be downloaded from Alberta Agriculture's web site at www.agriculture.alberta.ca and search *Pasture Scorecard*.

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Japanese Delegation Visits Alberta Honey Producers

Three businessmen from two Japanese companies, Sojitz Foods Corporation and Kato Brothers Honey Corporation, visited Alberta in mid-July to learn more about Alberta's beekeeping and honey production industry.

"These companies are looking to increase their supply of safe food products, in this case honey, from reliable countries such as Canada and from Alberta in particular," says John Larson, senior trade director for Asia, international marketing division of Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development, Edmonton.

The Alberta/Japan International Trade office in Tokyo extended an invitation to Sojitz Foods Corporation and Kato Brothers Honey Co. to conduct a study tour in Alberta to learn about the province's honey production capabilities. The delegation met with nine honey producers/processors from northern Alberta, had the chance to view the countryside on the way to the Peace Country and also spent some time in Jasper National Park.

"The Sojitz Foods Corporation is one of the largest trading companies in Japan," says Mr. Youtaro Suzuki, Honey Products Team, Sojitz Foods Corporation, Japan. "While we trade in many different kinds of foods from around the world, of the total amount of honey imported into Japan, Sojitz Foods imports over 30 per cent. Also, the largest honey company in Japan, Kato Brothers Honey Corporation, a company very well known to Japanese consumers, joined me on this visit to study the honey industry in Alberta. The amount of honey imported from Canada significantly increased in 2008 from the totals imported in 2007, and we want to continue this trend."

Japanese consumers prefer light coloured, delicate and mild tasting honey, making Canadian honey very suitable for the Japanese market. Canadian honey quality is very high with the strict regulations that honey producers adhere to – which also meets the needs of the Japanese market. Canada's reputation for producing safe food products makes it an ideal source for international markets such as Japan.

"For this visit, the government's role was to support and promote Alberta honey exporters, help them develop contacts and build partnerships and relationships that will enhance business interests in export markets such as Japan," says Larson. "The benefits of this visit include that it allowed us to introduce capable Alberta producers and processors to these representatives of large buying corporations from Japan, and hopefully it will result in increased sales of honey to Japan and increased growth for the industry."

Alberta honey producers take great pride in their product and the welcome they gave Mr. Suzuki, Mr. Nobuyuki Kato and Mr. Masaru Matsuki was very beneficial in showing international trading partners that Alberta honey is a product they can import with confidence.

Facilitating incoming missions is one of the major roles of the international marketing division of Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development. On average the division facilitates up to 20 incoming missions per year from Alberta's priority international markets – U.S., Japan, Mexico, China, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and parts of the EU. These missions help promote and create awareness of Alberta's capability across the various sectors of the agri-food industry.

More information on the international marketing division and on this and other trade missions is posted on the internet at www.agrifoodalberta.ca

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Branded Beef – Superior Quality or Credence Attributes?

With grilling season here, beef consumers will be looking for tenderness and consistency in the cuts of meat they choose, as well as variety in beef products. Alberta beef has a lot of variety allowing consumers to choose from heavily marbled, natural, lean, organic or other regionally branded labels. Like any food product, labels can educate to a certain degree. In addition, consumer taste panels and laboratory analyses from reputable beef brands can help provide more assurance to consumers.

When it comes to the differences that exist with branded beef products, some recently completed research might help consumers decide. This research undertaken by Dr. Susan Markus with the Agriculture Research Division, Stettler, looked at the variation in meat quality, assessed consumer acceptability of strip loins and documented production protocols that produce branded products from three different systems. These three systems for this study are defined as:

1. Commodity – is regularly available from grocery stores. It is beef from cattle raised under conventional production conditions in which the cattle may or may not have been fed animal by-products. The cattle may or may not have received antibiotics or hormones throughout their lives.
2. Natural – beef from cattle that were owned and humanely raised from birth to slaughter by members of a select group of natural beef producers. The cattle were fed a 100 per cent vegetarian diet (no animal by-products). The cattle were raised without hormones or antibiotics.
3. Organic – beef that is certified organic by the Organic Crop Improvement Association, an impartial, third-party organization. The cattle in this group were fed only certified organic feed during their lifetime. The cattle and the feed they consumed were raised without genetically modified organisms, hormones, pesticides, antibiotics, herbicides or animal by-products.

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“When grading a Canadian beef carcass as Canada Prime, Canada A, AA or AAA, marbling, fat colour, texture and fat measurements are all determining factors,” says Markus. “However, grade alone does not guarantee a satisfactory eating experience every time. Higher fat content and marbling is associated with the juiciness of AAA beef, but if a consumer is concerned about fat intake it is good to know the options available when making choices.”

Markus’ findings suggest that consumers need to decide what is important and what price range is sought before making the purchase. All the Alberta beef in the study was considered acceptably tender and juicy and flavourful to the consumer tasters. However, some statistically significant differences did emerge. The Natural brand was considered the most tender while the Organic brand had the lowest fat content. All the systems in the study had mean shear force values (which is the measure of tenderness) in the tender range. Beef under five per cent fat is considered lean, and the Organic brand had a mean fat content of just less than four per cent. The most consistent meat quality, and in particular tenderness, was found in the summer and fall seasons compared to the winter and spring. Weather conditions during transport and more variable ages of cattle going to slaughter at these times may negatively affect consistency.

“By design, these branded lines do differ and these differences cannot always be interpreted on a label,” says Markus. “Ultimately, if tenderness, flavour and juiciness are all you are concerned with when selecting beef as your protein source, there may be small differences from this research to help you narrow your decision as to which product you will purchase. However, if you demand more information from those who produce your protein source, having assurances from branded beef lines as to management history and quality control (humanely raised, environmentally sustainable, age verified, free of antibiotics etc.) will provide you with the additional peace of mind you require before making purchases. Since obvious large differences in meat quality and consumer preferences were not evident, these credence or social attributes may be used as decision making tools for informed beef consumers.”

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Rural Connections: Community Broadband Infrastructure Pilot Program

The Rural Development Division of Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development designed the Rural Connections: Community Broadband Infrastructure Pilot Program to targeted rural communities for projects that enable access to reasonable high-speed broadband service. This \$9 million in new funding is part of a Government of Alberta Community Adaptation and Transition Initiative to help economically vulnerable rural communities adapt by investing in economic development and diversification initiatives. Overall funding for the initiative was made available through the National Community Development Trust.

The program will consider applications to fund broadband projects in communities that are in transition because of changing economic circumstances, communities that are vulnerable to economic uncertainty as a result of dependence on a single employer or economic sector, and communities that currently have limited or no access to reasonable high-speed broadband service.

Eligible activities under the program include:

- infrastructure projects to benefit from the Alberta SuperNet
- testing and evaluating technologies to extend or enhance broadband service
- feasibility studies in support of broadband infrastructure projects
- outreach and extension programs to create a culture of broadband use and skill sets

The following are eligible to apply for funding from the program:

- local authorities (as defined in the *Municipal Government Act*) that are legal entities
- Bands, as defined in the *Indian Act*
- Métis settlements
- incorporated not-for-profit community organizations
- cooperatives that do not distribute profits to their members or shareholders

For-profit businesses or ventures are not eligible for funding, but may be a partner with an eligible applicant on a project.

The program will provide up to 75 per cent of eligible project costs to a maximum of \$500,000 per project. Successful applicants will be required to cost-share the project. The minimum grant request considered will be \$10,000 per project. Program funding expires on March 31, 2011, or earlier depending on availability of funds.

Applicants must complete an application form and submit a project proposal to Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development. Applications will be screened for meeting program requirements and criteria. Not all projects may be approved. Only those applications best meeting the program criteria will be considered.

Downloadable **Program Guidelines and Criteria** and the **Program Application Form** are available on Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development's website at www.agriculture.alberta.ca and search **Community Broadband Infrastructure Pilot Program**.

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Agri-News Briefs

History In Motion

The United Farmers of Alberta (UFA) **History In Motion** traveling exhibit has been a big hit in the communities it has visited this so far summer. The exhibit is contained in a 53-foot-long museum-on-wheels that details the 100-year history of United Farmers of Alberta Co-operative Limited and commemorates a century of cooperative service to rural Alberta. The trailer includes interactive exhibits, educational displays, games and videos. This traveling museum is owned and operated by the United Farmers Historical Society (UFHS), a non-profit historical society dedicated to collecting, preserving and exhibiting the history of the UFA and rural Alberta. The artefacts and information in the exhibit come from the UFHS archives and artefact collections. Admission is free. Visit **History in Motion** to learn about the history of agricultural and co-operatives in Alberta at these locations this summer:

Strathmore	Strathmore Heritage Days
July 30	3:00 – 8:00
July 31	3:00 - 8:00
August 1	11:00 – 7:00
August 2	11:00 – 7:00

Red Deer	Red Deer Farm & Ranch Supply Store
August 8	12:00 – 4:00
Pine Lake	Pine Lake Country Fair and Sports Days
August 9	11:00 – 4:00
Hanna	Town & Country Trade Show
August 12	1:00 – 5:00
August 13	9:00 – 5:00
Westlock	Westlock Agricultural Fair
August 15	12:00 – 7:00
Lethbridge	Whoop-Up Days
August 22	1:00 – 7:00
Taber	Taber Cornfest
August 28	2:00 – 6:00
August 29	9:00 – 5:00

For more information, contact Carolyn Foard at Carolyn.foard@ufa.com or call 403-570-4547. Information is also available on the UFA website at www.ufa.com