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Utilizing disaster aid programs: Important points to remember

By James Sedman and John Hewlett

Disaster relief for crop and livestock producers took a big step forward with the passage of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (2008 Farm Bill).

The legislation created a permanent disaster assistance trust fund as well as several permanent disaster relief programs. This eliminates the need to pass yearly disaster-relief legislation.

The legislation is an improvement over past disaster aid programs that only made payments for losses for one year in a three- or four-year period. The new programs, including the Supplemental Revenue Assistance Program (SURE), Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP), and the Livestock Forage Assistance Program (LFP), can provide emergency assistance on a year-by-year basis.

There are several important points producers should remember when considering to include one or more of these programs in their risk management planning.

Insurance Buy-in Requirement

The main requirement for most of the new disaster aid programs (excluding the LIP program) is that producers either purchase a qualifying Federal Crop Insurance Corporation program policy or Non-Insured Disaster Assistance program (NAP) coverage.

To qualify for SURE, crop producers must have a minimum of a catastrophic coverage (CAT) crop insurance policy for all insurable crops and NAP coverage for all non-insurable crops.

A producer's actual production history is used to help determine losses. Crop losses must be at least 10 percent due to weather and 50 percent in a non-disaster declared county.

The LFP and Emergency Livestock Assistance Program (ELAP) programs require livestock producers to purchase either Pasture, Rangeland, Forage -Vegetation Index (VI-PRF) insurance or NAP coverage.

Disaster Declarations Requirements

Most of the new disaster programs require a county or state disaster declaration be made or that the affected operation be adjacent to a disaster-declared county.

The SURE program requires that a producer is in a declared disaster county and experiences a 10-percent or higher production loss or experiences a 50-percent or higher loss due to a natural disaster.

The LIP program does not require a disaster declaration but does require documentation to prove losses related to an extreme weather-related event. The programs that cover grazing losses (ELAP and LFP) rely on data from the U.S. Drought Monitor to determine disaster conditions.

Income and Payment Limit Requirements

As with all new Farm Bill programs, payment and income limits apply. To participate in these programs, a producer's adjusted non-farm gross income may not exceed $500,000. Annual payments from all disaster programs may not exceed $100,000 per year. Large commercial operations should take this into account in their risk management planning – particularly if the potential losses are considerably higher than the limit. In such cases, operations will need to consider additional risk management protection such as insurance.

SURE and other program payment calculations take into account any and all payments received from crop insurance policies in the event of a loss.

Depending on the disaster program, the payment is reduced either by a percentage or by the amount of indemnity received through the crop insurance program.

Remember, because these programs are tied to crop insurance coverage, the higher the level of coverage the higher the payment will be in the event of a disaster.

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For more information

Consult local Farm Service Agency personnel for more information on eligibility for disaster aid programs mentioned in this article and for other disaster aid programs. While no one can completely plan for a disaster, managers can obtain coverage for various risks by ensuring they are eligible for disaster assistance programs.

For more information on this and other risk management topics on the Web, visit the Western Risk Management Library online at agecon.uwyo.edu/riskmgt.

Blister beetles in alfalfa hay can pose problems for livestock

By Sandra Frost

Of the 300 or more species of blister beetles in the United States, only three are found in Wyoming.

Black (*Epicauta pensylvanica*), ash-gray (*Epicauta fabricii*), and spotted (*Epicauta maculate*) blister beetles may be found around the state.

Blister beetles contain cantharidin, an irritant capable of blistering internal and external body tissues of livestock. Horses are more susceptible to the toxin than other livestock. Livestock come into contact with the toxin when they eat alfalfa hay containing dead beetles.

Blister beetles are a concern to alfalfa hay producers selling in the horse hay market and those buying horse feed.

For more information

Blister Beetles
http://ces.uwyo.edu/PUBS/B1013.03.pdf

Blister Beetles in Alfalfa
http://www.ksre.ksu.edu/library/entml2/mf959.pdf

Cantharidin poisoning
www.merckvetmanual.com
Click on Toxicology on left-hand side. Click Cantharidin Poisoning link.

Black blister beetle *Epicauta pensylvanica*
Photo: Joseph Berger, Bugwood.org

Ash-gray blister beetle *Epicauta fabricii*
Photo: University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension

Spotted blister beetle *Epicauta maculate*
Photo: Colorado State University

Blister beetle larvae hatch from small, yellow eggs laid in the soil or on flowers during the summer. Newly hatched, active larvae eat primarily grasshopper egg pods. Within a month of hatching, the larvae change into a mummy-like, overwinter form. The larvae change into non-descript pupae in late spring. New adults emerge two weeks later, begin feeding on plant foliage, and lay eggs for the next generation of blister beetles. The adults may form swarms on alfalfa hay.

Beetles in Wyoming

Blister beetles in Wyoming are approximately ¾-inch long, slender, soft-bodied, and fairly long-legged. (see photos) The head is clearly visible from above. The neck is long and narrower than the back. The ash-gray blister beetle has dense, short, gray hairs covering a black body. The black blister beetle is pure black. The spotted blister beetle has black spots on a background of dense, short, gray hairs.

Adult beetles have varying amounts of toxin in their bodies so predicting the toxic effect of a particular number of beetles on livestock is difficult. Signs and symptoms of cantharidin poisoning include blisters and ulcerations, colic, and diarrhea accompanied by blood and/or discarded intestinal tract mucosal linings in the stools. Signs associated with disorders of the urinary system may be present. Calcium-deficient signs, including tremors or periodic jerking contractions of the diaphragm synchronized with the heartbeat, may be present.

Most-Common Beetles Have Low Toxicity

Merl Raisbeck, toxicologist at the Wyoming State Veterinary Laboratory (WSVL), said the beetles most common in Wyoming have low toxicity. The WSVL has never diagnosed poisoning by the *Epicautis pensylvania* beetle (black blister beetle), the more common beetle.

Hay producers and livestock feeders should be cautious, and, if there is any question about a particular batch of hay, it should be fed to cattle rather than horses.

There are strategies to manage the risk of catharidin-contaminated hay. Hay cuttings from mid- to late-summer may have beetles since this is when adults are feeding and flying. Inspect your hayfield before cutting for possible swarms of blister beetles and avoid cutting where there are swarms. Beetles are highly mobile and can easily move between inspection and cutting times. Beetles may be more frequent around the edge of the hayfield than farther out into the field.

Kill as Few as Possible During Harvest

The harvest goal is to kill as few beetles as possible – live beetles will leave the windrows. Kansas State University researchers tested haying equipment and evaluated its effect on blister beetles in the hay. Findings were that a self-propelled mower/windrower (without conditioning rollers) produced the least blister beetle mortality. Windrows were straddled by wide-set wheels.

Almost all blister beetles passed through the machine virtually unscathed and left the windrow and the field before the loose hay was baled, according to the information.

Bales made from windrows at the ends of fields where swather wheels crush hay and beetles is at higher risk than bales from inside the field. Avoid mowing sections of a field at a time that may force beetles to move to the uncut sections where a higher population of beetles builds overnight.

Wyoming has had no confirmed cases of cantharidin poisoning. If cantharidin poisoning is suspected, consult a veterinarian experienced with this condition. Species of blister beetle vary in cantharidin content, distribution, seasonal occurrence, and tendency to form swarms.

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