



# PEST MANAGEMENT & CROP DEVELOPMENT

## BULLETIN

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## INSECTS

### The Search for Soybean Aphids Intensifies

After learning that entomologists at the University of Minnesota and Michigan State University had found soybean aphids in soybeans in their respective states, we intensified our survey efforts to determine whether this invasive pest had begun to colonize soybean fields in Illinois. Survey teams coordinated by David Onstad, Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences, and David Voegtlin, Illinois Natural History Survey, examined soybean fields in northern Illinois during the weeks of June 18 and June 25. And their efforts have borne fruit. One survey team found soybean aphids in soybean fields in seven counties on June 20: Cook, Grundy, Kane, Kendall, Lake, McHenry, and Will. The soybean plants were in the V2 to V4 stages of development. The numbers of aphids found within a field ranged from 1 to 20 per 30 plants, and some of the aphids were alates (winged forms). The surveyors used a survey technique that has been agreed on by entomologists throughout the Midwest—examining 30 plants, each for only 45 seconds, and recording the numbers of aphids found.

More recently, entomologists at the University of Illinois found soybean aphids in a small field on the South Farm on June 25 and 26. This finding in Champaign County represents the most southern occurrence of the aphids in Illinois thus far.

*So what does our finding soybean aphids in soybean fields mean thus far?* Finding soybean aphids right now tells us that they survived the winter successfully on buckthorn (*Rhamnus* species). Finding the aphids in soybean fields means that they are leaving their primary overwintering host (buckthorn) to colonize their secondary host (soybean). But that's about all we know at this point.

Because of the seemingly sudden appearance of soybean aphids in the Midwest last year, some individuals might be inclined to overreact to their appearance in soybeans again this year. However, at this point, it's way too early to try to do anything about the pests. After all, the numbers of aphids found have been very low. And remember, we are looking specifically for soybean aphids, not carrying out typical scouting efforts. Most people trying to look for soybean aphids right now won't find them. In addition, the surveyors were in numerous fields in which they were unable to find soybean aphids.

If you decide to begin looking for soybean aphids, please make certain to accurately identify any insects you find. While looking at soybean plants on the South Farm, we found many potato leafhopper nymphs. First-instar potato leafhoppers are about the same size as a soybean aphid, and because we were in the field early in the morning, the leafhoppers were not very active. My eyesight isn't what it used to be, so I was fooled initially. However, a good hand lens revealed that some of the critters were potato leafhopper nymphs, not soybean aphids. When we prodded the leafhoppers, they characteristically curled their abdomens over their backs (sort of like a scorpion) or moved rapidly sideways or backwards.

We are not certain whether soybean aphid populations will build to economic levels this year because so many extenuating circumstances exist. For example, we witnessed significant natural control of aphids last year by a host of natural enemies, not the least of which was the multicolored Asian lady beetle, *Harmonia axyridis*. There is every reason to believe that predators, parasitoids, and pathogens will have some impact on soybean aphid populations this year. We also are not certain what environmental conditions in the Midwest will favor a buildup of soybean aphid populations. If developments this year mirror what happened in 2000, we probably won't see threatening levels of soybean aphids until mid- to late July.

Our recommendation right now is to sit tight and keep current with what we and other entomologists in the Midwest are observing. There are a lot of entomologists planning to conduct research on the soybean aphid in 2001, and there's a lot of chatter among everyone involved. We will continue our surveys, focusing first in northern and central Illinois and then extending into southern counties. We will distribute our findings in articles in the *Bulletin*, in news releases, in radio interviews, and through several venues on the Web (for example, the Soybean Aphid Watch discussed in issue no. 13, June 22, of the *Bulletin*).—Kevin Steffey

### Reports of Silking Clipping by Japanese Beetles

As I indicated in last week's *Bulletin*, Omar Koester reported the first Japanese beetles of the season in Monroe County on June 20, very similar to last year's first sightings of this insect pest. In general, only producers in eastern Illinois have had severe problems in cornfields and soybean fields with Japanese beetles. However, with each successive year, we seem to have increasing numbers of reports from

producers in southwestern counties who are now battling this insect. This week Omar provided us with images of Japanese beetle adults feeding on corn silks. We have also received reports from Doug Gucker, Piatt County unit assistant, University of Illinois Extension, of Japanese beetle adults feeding on red clover blossoms, and Larry Martin, Monsanto, reported Japanese beetle adults in cornfields and soybean fields in Fayette and Shelby counties.

The Japanese beetle was first reported in the United States (New Jersey) in 1916. This insect pest has now spread into all states east of the Mississippi River, with the exception of Mississippi and Florida. Isolated pockets of Japanese beetles also have been reported in Missouri, Iowa, and Nebraska as well as California, where it was apparently eradicated. Although most of our readers are concerned with the injury inflicted on cornfields and soybean fields, Japanese beetles also are pests of many ornamental plants and fruit trees.

Like many of the other grub species that have plagued Illinois producers this spring, this pest promises to be no exception. In the coming weeks of July, corn growers are urged to monitor their pollinating fields for Japanese beetle adults and their silk clipping activities.

If silks are clipped to less than 1/2 inch in length, less than 50% of the plants have been pollinated, and three or more adults per ear are found, a rescue treatment should be considered. After anthesis, corn is less susceptible to damage; however, in August, producers will increasingly turn their attention to soybean fields and defoliation caused by this insect pest. Insecticides labeled and economic thresholds for both crops were presented in last week's *Bulletin*. Let us know what local densities of Japanese beetles are like in your respective areas of the state.—Susan Ratcliffe and Mike Gray

### Grasshopper Nymphs Are Out and About

Doug Gucker, Piatt County Extension unit office, reported numerous grasshopper nymphs feeding on soybean plants this week. As you continue to scout fields for key insect pests, such as corn rootworms, Japanese beetles, and corn borers in corn and bean leaf beetles in soybeans, add grasshoppers to your list of pests to keep an eye on.

The two most common species of grasshoppers in Illinois are the differential and redlegged grasshoppers. They have similar life cycles. Females lay eggs in the soil by forming burrows with their abdomens. They deposit clusters of eggs 0.5 to 2 inches below the soil surface, then secrete a frothy covering over the eggs; soil particles adhere to the frothy secretion. The secretion hardens, forming a soil-covered egg pod about 1 inch long. The number of eggs in each pod varies from less than 10 to more than 100. A single female deposits an average of 200 to 300 eggs in her lifetime. Most species deposit eggs in uncultivated fields, roadsides, and pastures. These areas are called "egg beds," and the numbers of eggs in the egg beds are extremely large during outbreak years.

Egg hatch can begin in late April but may be as late as early July. June is usually the month when grasshoppers begin to emerge from their overwintering quarters in Illinois. A warm spring after a warm fall favors early hatching; a cool fall and spring delay egg hatch.

Differential and redlegged grasshoppers have five (occasionally six) instars. The first instar is very small, about 1/8 inch. With adequate food and warm, dry weather, nymphal development requires 35 to 50 days. Both species complete one generation per year.

Most people associate grasshoppers with hot, dry weather. In general, that association is true. Weather regulates the size of grasshopper populations and the effect they have on the crop. Temperatures during the previous summer can influence the current season's grasshopper population. A large number of warm, sunny days from late June through September allows grasshoppers to develop quickly, thus allowing females to deposit large numbers of eggs. Conversely, numerous cool days through the same period result in fewer eggs being deposited. Extreme, prolonged drought causes eggs to desiccate or stops egg development. Wet weather in the late spring and summer also may promote establishment and development of a fungal disease organism that can suppress grasshopper populations. Consequently, the weather thus far this year suggests that grasshoppers may not be problematic in Illinois. However, as the season continues, especially if the weather becomes hot and dry, we will need to remain watchful of grasshoppers in our crops.—*Susan Ratcliffe and Kevin Steffey*

### Parasitoids of Armyworms Have Been Common

In the aftermath of the significant outbreak of armyworms in Illinois and elsewhere in the Midwest, many keen observers have found white, cottony masses that appear to be either eggs or cocoons. Some people have feared that they had found armyworm eggs. However, we have learned from photographs and specimens sent to us that the white, cottony masses were cocoons of a parasitic wasp, tentatively identified by Rob Wiedenmann (Illinois Natural History Survey) as *Glyptapanteles militaris* in the family Braconidae. This parasitoid attacks armyworms as well as several other caterpillars.

This is a good sign. Many of us are waiting and watching for the second generation of armyworms to show up.

Fair numbers of adult moths have been flying for some time now, so we know the females have begun to lay eggs. In fact, I suspect that young larvae are present in some areas, particularly in southern Illinois. However, *G. militaris* and other natural enemies could suppress armyworm populations and keep them well below economic levels. So, as we wait and watch, let's also root for the good guys!—*Kevin Steffey*

### Is Anyone Concerned About Corn Borers?

The telephones have been relatively silent, and the Internet wires are pretty cool right now, at least as they relate to European corn borers. We are aware of only a few instances where corn borers might pose a threat that will require action. Andrew Larson, a science instructor at Black Hawk College East Campus in Kewanee (Henry County) followed up on a previous report of a field with 30% infestation and 2.3 larvae per plant in Knox County. He visited several fields in the Galvan and Altona areas (Henry and Knox counties) and reported that some had near-threshold infestations of first-generation European corn borers. He has been watching the development of this generation carefully and observed a significant egg hatch on June 19 and 20.

In southern Illinois, European corn borers have been very hard to find. Ron Hines, senior research specialist at the Dixon Springs Agricultural Center, has captured very low numbers of European corn borer moths in his battery of traps at four sites in Massac, Pope, and Pulaski counties this year. On the other hand, his captures of southwestern corn borers have been significant. Although most entomologists believe that first-generation southwestern corn borers cause little economic damage, noting their presence is warranted in anticipation of the potentially very destructive second generation. Ron indicated that fourth- and probably fifth-instar southwestern

corn borers can be found in cornstalks right now. The flight of moths that will lay eggs for the second generation is just around the corner.

Maintain a vigil for both species of corn borers and let us know what you observe. We've skated through the first summer month with little impact from either one, but favorable environmental conditions could tip the scales in the borers' favor.—*Kevin Steffey and Mike Gray*

### More Lepidoptera to Watch For

For issue no. 9 (May 25, 2001) of the *Bulletin*, I wrote an article titled "Will 2001 Be the Year of Lepidoptera?" At that time, armyworms and variegated cutworms were wreaking havoc in most areas of the state, and black cutworms were causing some distress, too. Although European corn borers have not been as aggravating as their brethren, there still is time for them and other Lepidoptera to give us headaches. Therefore, a couple of somewhat unusual situations bear reporting in this article.

Many of you will recall that we had some minor outbreaks of a pest known as the thistle caterpillar, *Vanessa cardui*, in soybean fields a few years ago. This year I am aware of one report of large numbers of these striking caterpillars feeding on thistles in and near a soybean field in Ford County. According to the report, the caterpillars were not feeding on the soybeans yet. Matt Montgomery, Extension unit educator in Sangamon and Menard counties, reported that he has seen a large number of painted lady butterflies in his area. As many of you know, the beautiful painted lady butterfly is the adult stage of the same species. One might ask, "How could such beautiful parents produce such ugly offspring?" But then we've all known . . . never mind.

Thistle caterpillars are about 1-1/4 to 1-1/2 inches long when fully grown. They are brown to black, with a

yellow stripe along each side of the body. Their most striking features, however, are the branched spines that cover the larva's body. The painted lady butterfly is brown with red and orange mottling and black and white spots. They can be observed easily in the countryside.

The painted lady does not overwinter in the Midwest; rather, it migrates into our area each spring from tropical or subtropical locations. Females lay eggs singly on hosts, and the eggs hatch in about 7 days. The larvae (thistle caterpillars) feed for 2 to 6 weeks on more than 100 species of plants, including Canada thistle, soybean, sunflower, garden vegetables, and ornamentals. When large numbers occur, they can become economic pests of soybeans. They feed on the leaves, defoliating plants and webbing the leaves together. The published threshold is three or more larvae per plant for soybean stages V3 and V4. The threshold should be higher for more mature plants, or you can rely on percentage defoliation (25 to 40% defoliation, depending on the stage of soybean development) as a treatment guide.

The other, even more unusual occurrence was reported by Walt Longo and Bob Bess with Mason County Service Company. They sent me a photo of several hornworms that they had found in a field of sweet corn in Mason County. Although the photograph showed plenty of detail, I had no idea what I was looking at. However, I was able to use an insect key (*Field Key for Identification of Caterpillars Found on Field & Vegetable Crops in Colorado* from Colorado State University) to identify the species rather easily—whitelined sphinx, *Hyles lineata*. The "horn" on the rear end of the caterpillar was a dead giveaway that the insect was the larva of a sphinx or hawk moth, but I was not aware that any of these insects had ever been seen feeding in field crops. However, another reference I consulted indicated that this species feeds on many crop and ornamental plants.

In addition to the horn, the whitelined sphinx caterpillar has striking coloration—black or yellow stripes the entire length of the body but highly variable in color, ranging from almost entirely black, with a yellow pattern, to almost entirely yellow or green, with a black pattern. Walt indicated that the defoliation injury to leaves was obvious but not serious. However, he and Bob observed very large numbers of these caterpillars crawling from a field of sweet corn to a neighboring field.

So add two more Lepidoptera to our list for 2001. I suspect we will add others before this season is over.—

*Kevin Steffey*

### **New Insecticide (Tracer) Labeled for Use in Field Crops**

Last week I read an informative article written by Chris DiFonzo in Michigan State University's *Crop Advisory Alert*, volume 16, no. 9, June 2, 2001. Chris is an extension entomologist at Michigan State University. She had become aware of the rather recent registration of a new insecticide, Tracer, manufactured by Dow AgroSciences. This insecticide had been registered for use on cotton, but the label was revised in early May to include registrations for use on field corn, seed corn, popcorn, teosinte, wheat, barley, buckwheat, rye, and oats. Tracer also is registered for use on sorghum, milo, pearl millet, proso millet, grain amaranth, and soybeans.

The active ingredient of Tracer (and Spintor for use on fruits and vegetables) is spinosad, one of a new class of insecticides called naturalytes. These insecticides are derived from the naturally occurring metabolites of the actinomycete fungus *Saccharopolyspora spinosa*. They are characterized as reduced-risk insecticides based on their low human toxicity and low impact on beneficial insects. Spinosad is a contact and a stomach poison but is typically more effective as a stomach poison.

Among the insects included on the revised Tracer label are armyworm in corn (2 to 3 fl oz per acre) and wheat and other small grains (1.5 to 3 fl oz per acre). Also included on the Tracer label are European corn borer in corn (1 to 3 fl oz per acre); corn earworm and southwestern corn borer in corn (2 to 3 fl oz per acre); armyworm, corn earworm, southwestern corn borer, and webworm in sorghum (1.5 to 3 fl oz per acre); green cloverworm in soybean (1 to 2 fl oz per acre); armyworm, corn earworm, and saltmarsh caterpillar in soybean (1.5 to 2 fl oz per acre); and cereal leaf beetle in wheat and other small grains (1.5 to 3 fl oz per acre). Preharvest intervals for corn grain, sorghum grain, soybean, and wheat grain are 28 days, 7 days, 28 days, and 21 days, respectively.

We have had limited experience with this new insecticide. However, we will search for efficacy data and offer some information about its performance in trials throughout the United States.—

*Kevin Steffey*

### **Alfalfa Blotch Leafminer Found in Several Illinois Counties**

Although the soybean aphid has captured most of the attention among invasive species of crops during the past couple of years, another invasive species seems to have gained a foothold in Illinois. The alfalfa blotch leafminer, *Agromyza frontella* (first discussed this year in issue no. 7 [May 11, 2001] of the *Bulletin*), invaded Minnesota from Canada in 1994. After becoming established in Minnesota, it spread throughout Wisconsin and was found in a couple of counties (Lake and McHenry) in Illinois by 1997.

Renewed survey efforts this year have revealed that the alfalfa blotch leafminer has spread considerably in Illinois. Jon Lundgren, a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Entomology, coordinated a survey in which I, David Feltes (IPM educator at the Quad Cities Extension Center), and Jim Morrison (crop systems educator

at the Rockford Extension Center) participated during the last week in April and the first couple of weeks in May. Jon has examined many samples and has confirmed the presence of the alfalfa blotch leafminer in the following 14 counties: Boone, DeKalb, Grundy, Iroquois, Kane, Kendall, Lake, Lee, McHenry, Ogle, Stephenson, Vermilion, Will, and Winnebago. Data from Carroll, Champaign, Ford, JoDaviess, and LaSalle counties have not been tabulated.

This insect has not been reported to cause much, if any, economic damage to alfalfa in the Midwest. However, its presence is worth noting. The first generation occurs at about the same time as alfalfa weevils are active, so scouts may find the characteristic blotch mines in the leaves as they monitor alfalfa fields. Probably our greatest concern is that insecticide applications to control alfalfa weevils may kill parasitoids that effectively suppress populations of alfalfa blotch leafminers. If that happens, alfalfa blotch leafminers could become problematic in some fields.

We plan to conduct a survey in mid- to late July to search for the second generation of alfalfa blotch leafminers, including a wider search into other counties. We'll keep you posted regarding any developments with this pest.—*Kevin Steffey*

## PLANT DISEASES

### Corn Stunting and Uneven Growth—Is It the Result of a Disease?

Reports have been coming in regarding corn that is stunted and showing uneven growth. There are many potential reasons for corn to be stunted this year in Illinois. The list of possible reasons includes herbicide damage, sub-optimal fertility, soil compaction, wet/flooded conditions, dry conditions, insect damage, cool weather, root diseases, and other factors. Some of the causes are poorly understood.

The purpose of this article is to remind you of factors that influence stunting and uneven growth, and to focus on disease that may cause these effects at this time of the year.

Observing the pattern of the problem in a cornfield is key to determining the cause. Soilborne pathogens, such as *Fusarium* and *Pythium*, tend to be scattered in patchy distributions in fields, often in association with old infested roots and plant debris. This fact can sometimes be related to scattered root infection and uneven growth. If you have been reading the *Bulletin* (issue no. 6, May 4, 2001) this year, you already have read about nematodes and how they can cause stunting and other problems for corn. Although other pathogens are more often recognized on corn, nematodes may be a hidden problem that is bigger and more widespread than is often acknowledged.

A primary cause for much of the uneven and stunted growth this year may be due to root rot diseases, in combination with the unusually cool weather we had a few weeks ago. Root rot pathogens of corn are common in many soils, but it often takes another stress factor, such as excessively cool or wet conditions or nutrient stress, before they cause problems.

Rotation out of corn is the key preemptive management strategy, and tolerant hybrids may be of value for minimizing fungal infections, but there are few management strategies that can be implemented at this time of the year for root diseases. The recent warm weather along with continued seasonal temperatures may allow some plants to still recover this season.—*Dean Malvick*

## CROP DEVELOPMENT

### Crunch Time for Corn

The latest crop condition report indicates that the Illinois corn crop is almost as tall as the 2000 crop was at this date, with 96% of the crop rated

as being in fair-to-excellent condition. The crop is well ahead of average development for this date, similar to last year's. Tassels are starting to appear in some early-planted fields, especially those with early hybrids. There are differences between the two crop years, though, and we might consider what if anything threatens the current crop, using last year's crop for comparison.

Pollination was excellent in 2000, resulting in the highest kernel numbers per acre we have ever had. June rainfall was above average in most parts of Illinois in 2000; in contrast, June has been relatively dry this year in many areas. While we normally think that dry June weather tends to favor root development, recent days have also brought some midafternoon leaf curling in fields in eastern Illinois, indicating that water is inadequate to maintain leaf function. Curled leaves do not photosynthesize well because the area exposed to sunlight is reduced and the stomata, tiny holes in the leaf that allow carbon dioxide to enter, close when leaves are stressed by inadequate water. Typically, leaves relax at night when the atmospheric demand decreases under higher relative humidity. Stomata open in the morning, and the leaves function well until demand for water by the dry air (low relative humidity) around the leaves exceeds the rate at which the roots can take water up.

The severity of the drought effect as soils dry can be estimated by noting when the leaves start to curl; the earlier in the day this happens, the more deficient the soil water is. The key question is how much effect drying soils and plant water deficits have on yield potential. Clearly, the beneficial effect of moderate dryness on root development starts to disappear when plants start to show drought symptoms, with likely limitations to yields accelerating quickly the closer to pollination that leaf curling (think: loss of photosynthesis) persists. Contrasting with the drought symptoms is the fact that dry weather usually brings a lot of sunshine, so when the

leaves are functioning, photosynthetic rates tend to be high. Leaf color is also good in most fields, which also means high photosynthetic capacity when water is adequate.

The actual effect of dryness is likely seen mostly through its effect on sugar level in the plant, which is difficult to measure. We can, however, probably expect kernel number to start to drop, probably by one or two percentage points for each day on which early-afternoon drought symptoms occur, starting about 10 days before pollination. More severe water shortages will limit kernel number even more. This is probably an oversimplification, in that return to adequate soil moisture can return plant status to normal quickly, especially early in the prepollination period. But a drop in leaf function due to water shortage is a serious problem when the crop approaches pollen shed.

Under normal conditions, tassels will emerge and start to shed pollen soon after they have cleared the last leaf sheath. First silks should appear at about the same time as the first pollen is shed. Pollen shed usually occurs in the morning after the dew starts to dry off and is usually completed for the day by mid- to late morning. There are a few clues to tell you that dryness is affecting growth, and probably yield potential, during this period. Plants stressed by dryness tend to grow more slowly, and tassels may take an extra day or two to emerge fully. They might also start to shed pollen (indicated by the exerted anthers) before they have fully emerged. A more serious indicator of dryness effects is delayed appearance of silks. Silks grow at night when plant water status is highest, and under ideal conditions new silks should have appeared to receive pollen as it is shed in the morning. If pollen seems to be shedding from several places on the tassel and no silks have yet emerged, pollination might not be completed before pollen shed ends.

Growing degree-day accumulations since planting have been near normal in many parts of the state, and where corn was planted early, it will pollinate relatively early. As indicated above, pollination has already begun in some fields. We expect the peak pollination period to be the first and second weeks of July. Even though we need sunlight to drive photosynthesis during this period, the crop needs water even more. Thus the success of pollination will be closely tied to soil water levels over the next 2 weeks.—*Emerson Nafziger*

## REGIONAL REPORTS

Extension center educators, unit educators, and unit assistants in northern, west-central, east-central, and southern Illinois prepare regional reports to provide more localized insight into pest situations and crop conditions in Illinois. The reports will keep you up to date on situations in field and forage crops as they develop throughout the season. The regions have been defined broadly to include the agricultural statistics districts as designated by the Illinois Agricultural Statistics Service, with slight modifications:

- North (Northwest and Northeast districts, plus Stark and Marshall counties)
- West central (West and West Southwest districts, and Peoria, Woodford, Tazewell, Mason, Menard, and Logan counties from the Central district)
- East central (East and East Southeast districts [except Marion, Clay, Richland, and Lawrence counties], McLean, DeWitt, and Macon counties from the Central district)
- South (Southwest and Southeast districts, and Marion, Clay, Richland, and Lawrence counties from the East Southeast district)

We hope these reports will provide additional benefits for staying current as the season progresses.

### Northern Illinois

The corn crop has progressed rapidly during the past week due to adequate soil moisture and higher temperatures. Soybean postemergence herbicide applications have been the main activity during the past week.

No insect outbreaks have been reported. However, potato leafhoppers are still present in alfalfa and need to be monitored. To date, very little European corn borer damage has been reported or observed.

Jim Morrison, crop systems educator, reported several soybean cyst nematode-infested fields. Overall, soybean replants have occurred in a very small percentage of acreage, but replants have occurred throughout northern Illinois due to seedling diseases.

### Southern Illinois

Although it is still dry, many locations have adequate topsoil moisture. Corn is VT-R1 and soybeans are R1-R2.

Wheat is plus 90% harvested, with double-cropped soybeans at VE.

Late-harvested wheat came in at lower test weights.

Some corn is showing “twisted whorl.” Spray drift calls have become more numerous.

It is fairly quiet on the insect front. Japanese beetles are a concern at some locations. We are still waiting to assess southwestern corn borers.

### West-Central Illinois

Good growing conditions have existed during the past week. As a result, crop development has been rapid. Many cornfields have tasseled and soybeans are growing at a swift pace.

Very few pest problems have been reported for corn.

Roundup and other postemergence herbicide applications on soybean are being completed. Some minor disease problems, such as brown spot, have been observed in some fields.

Wheat harvest is well under way and should be completed soon. Yields are above average and quality is excellent. One flour miller indicated, "This is the best quality I have seen in 6 or 7 years." Soil conditions for double-cropping at this time are excellent.

Potato leafhopper populations are increasing in alfalfa.

Mowing of roadsides, ditches, and pastures is taking place.

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