

IMPACT



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Idaho Cooperative Extension Coordinates the Control of the Mormon Cricket Invasion of Cassia County

The Situation

The climatic conditions of Southern Idaho, Northern Nevada and Northern Utah in the 2006 growing season, made it possible for the Mormon Cricket population to expand very rapidly. As the long hot days of summer appeared, so did the Mormon Crickets in the three corner areas of Idaho, Utah and Nevada. Over the past 3-4 years, Nevada and Utah were reporting a large increase in the number of crickets on the Idaho border. By the middle of July, they were on the march into Idaho. Scouts reported that there were 4 main armies of crickets moving in a North-East direction into Idaho, and headed for the irrigated lands around Almo. Each army was 100-300 yards wide and one and half miles long. It was evident that the crickets were competing with cattle on the dry land pastures, and were moving rapidly toward the irrigated alfalfa, wheat and barley. These crickets were adults and ready to lay eggs. If left undisturbed, eggs would be laid and there would be a larger problem next year.

Our Response

When the residents of Almo and surrounding areas began to notice the crickets by the millions marching for their fields, they contacted the Cassia County Extension Office for help. Most residents wanted a spray program to control the crickets. Widespread chemical control was not possible on BLM lands.

Inquires were made to the Idaho Department of Agriculture and the Plant Protection and Quarantine Office of USDA. Within one day, the Idaho Department of Agriculture delivered 2 tons of cricket bait to Burley for farmers and ranchers to spread in front of the crickets. Cassia County Weed Control furnished a spreader to the farmers/ranchers that could be pulled behind a 4 wheeler. Bait was spread in less than a week and another request was made for 5 tons. Three days later the bait arrived and was delivered to a county shed in Almo. A local person was put in charge of issuing out the bait. That same day, a Plant Protection and Quarantine Officer with USDA arrived with a crew of four men, four 4 wheelers with attached spreaders, and 5 more tons of bait. They were able to cover about 2500 acres of BLM grazing land. Only half of the land was covered with bait by a stripping application, thus lowering the amount of chemical used per acre.

With the assistance of Representative Mike Simpson's Office, 2 more spreaders were left with area farmers, to be used as needed. This year, the Mormon Crickets were concentrated in "hotspots." If these areas were left untreated, cricket numbers would have expanded and the area impacted would have been 10 times as big next year. The state and federal goal to keep the cricket population under control, was one of the driving forces that led to the fast response of control measures.

Program Outcomes

In total, 88 residents received bait and spread it over approximately 6,083 acres protecting 22,500 acres of irrigated cropland. Only 1 to 2% of the crickets ever reached the cropland. The vast majority were killed on grazing land. APHIS surveyed the area and made counts of surviving crickets and reported a 95% kill. This still left approximately 5% to lay eggs that will be hatching next year.

The Future

Starting early in the spring of 2007, scouting efforts will take place to determine where the nymphs will likely begin to emerge. Remaining bait stocks (2800 pounds stored in Almo) are on hand along with bait applicators. When necessary, baiting may resume with no time lost for acquiring the necessary materials and equipment. The Idaho State Department of Agriculture and USDA-APHIS will assist with the early scouting and continue with the control efforts next summer. Funding will depend in part on the severity of next summer's problem.

For More Information

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