

Managing Potato Leafhopper in Alfalfa

The Problem

Potato leafhoppers feed on plant sap by inserting their stylet into leaves. This direct feeding causes loss of photosynthetic efficiency. However, the major problem is that a column of tissue is deposited that interferes with normal plant vascular movement. This leads to stunting, abnormal development and leaf necrosis.

The Result

Potato leafhoppers steal your money in many ways. They cause a lower yield in the year of infestation, through less growth and slower regrowth. The lower yield is multiplied by a drastic reduction in quality, especially protein content. They weaken plants significantly which leads to a higher degree of winterkill in affected fields. They cause lower yield in following years, with losses of up to 0.5 ton/acre each year following.

What to do

There are two primary methods of preventing major economic losses. One is to plant resistant alfalfa varieties or non-affected forage crops such as red clover. The other is to spray your alfalfa acreage with insecticides. Scouting is THE KEY to preventing losses in non-resistant varieties. Proper scouting leads to proper timing of insecticide application. The information in the attached bulletin will help you to minimize scouting time while still providing for trustworthy estimates of leafhopper numbers. The last step is to decide if treating is economically feasible. See reverse for help in making that decision.