



Bi-state www.TVPestAlert.net helps Treasure Valley growers manage pesticides wisely

If certified crop advisor Phil Allison knows that powdery mildew is beginning to smudge sugarbeets just across the Oregon border on July 15, he can advise his growers in Nampa to treat their crops with preventative fungicides by July 20. “You’d be surprised how long you can postpone mildew with a little bit of prevention,” says Allison, who works for Landview Fertilizer Inc.

If alfalfa seed grower Jim Briggs of Marsing knows when lygus bugs will hatch in the Treasure Valley, he can start scouting his fields for them and make plans to stop irrigating in time for the necessary pesticide application.

And if onion thrips are coming on strong in the next valley over, onion growers can start mulching their furrows with straw to boost populations of the thrip-killing beneficial insects the mulch supports.

Rapid dissemination of pest-outbreak information across the Treasure Valley is why Extension educators at both the University of Idaho and Oregon State University launched the interactive, Internet-based Treasure Valley Pest Alert service (www.TVPestAlert.net) in 2001. With \$1 of every \$5-7 that producers spend on their crops going to crop-protection chemicals, applying those chemicals at just the right time and only when control will be cost-effective is essential.

Sometimes, producers even find they can stop spraying entirely. When alerts sent directly to subscribers’ e-mail boxes relayed the news that a new disease in

onions was a virus—not a fungus—they suspended fungicide sprays.

Jerry Neufeld, UI Extension educator in Canyon County, coordinates the service, with help in Idaho from colleagues Steve Reddy in Washington County, Tim Davis in Payette County and Brad Geary at the Parma Research & Extension Center and in Oregon from Ben Simko, Clint Shock and Lynn Jensen. Growers “really appreciate” the e-mail heads-ups, Neufeld says, because they can be caught off-guard by encroaching plant pests. “They’re farming 800 acres, they’re irrigating, they’re growing 10 different crops, they’re going 90 miles an hour for 14 hours a day for 8 months. They’ve just got so much to do.”

Each alert also links to a reference page, which includes research-based information about the pest’s life cycle, potential threat and available controls. Some of the alerts include weather-related data: for example, accumulated heat units that forecast the first hatch of pests like sugarbeet root maggots, corn earworms and Western cherry fruit flies. Alerts may also include economic data, such as how many pests per plant justify spraying. A calendar of upcoming workshops and meetings is an added bonus.

In 2001, Neufeld tabulated 5,899 Web site visits and 114 e-mail subscribers. A year later, the service had attracted 186 e-mail subscribers and 8,975 Web site visits. “I think the potential here in the Treasure Valley is much bigger than that,” he says.

“There are already a fair amount of guys



The Pest Alert Network provides timely information about pest outbreaks. Find it at www.TVPestAlert.net

using it, and those that are using it are liking it,” says Terry Cane, a fieldman for The Amalgamated Sugar Co. in Nampa. “I think it’s a valuable tool and one that we need to keep.”

Because the service also allows subscribers to initiate alerts, Cane uses it to let other sugar company fieldmen—and field representatives for other firms—know about verified problems. Assigned to large areas, Idaho field representatives need as many watchful eyes on crops as they can get.

Allison considers the service an “environmental stewardship” program because it helps producers in two states make wiser use of pesticides. “It’s a way for everybody in this industry to work together,” he says.

