

# Pest Watch

**Agronomists offer their insights on insect and disease pressures to watch for in the 2009 growing season.**

## Northern Alberta

Erin Brock, Canola Council of Canada Agronomist, Peace Region

“Canola diseases to look out for in 2009 are sclerotinia, black leg, and clubroot. On the insect front, flea beetles are always a concern, but high fall numbers mean spring populations will be especially large. Cabbage seedpod weevil is a concern in Southern Alberta and we will be tracking its progress north. As for diamondback moth and bertha armyworm, surveys will be carried out in the spring to monitor those populations.”

Jason Casselman, Peace FSG Agronomy Manager, Cargill

“Growers may be tempted to sacrifice seed treatment in 2009 because of the increased cost of inputs, but it is very important that they do not do so. With the risk of seedling diseases and root rots, proper seed treatments are vital in order to grow good crops. Another thing growers might try is cutting back on seeding rates, but this leads to flea-beetle damage because there is that much less canola insecticide in the ground. A field in the Grand Prairie area tested positive for clubroot this year, which is the first time the Peace region has been affected with it. Growers must avoid moving soil from one field to another in order to keep clubroot from spreading further.”

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## Central Alberta

Tom Luethi, Warburg Seed Cleaning Plant, Leduc

“Clubroot poses the biggest threat to Leduc County. Leduc County Ag Services is advising growers to limit their use of canola in their rotation to once every four to five years to reduce the risk of infection. It is up to the grower to test for diseases, but our plant requires that growers have a disease certificate before the seed comes in for cleaning. We are also always aware of the threat of fusarium, even though it is not prevalent at the moment.”

## Southern Alberta

Scott Meers, Insect Management Specialist, Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development

“Cabbage seedpod weevil will probably be an issue next year. Flea beetles have increased in numbers and are likely to do so again next year. Grasshoppers have done reasonably well in parts of Alberta. Although the wheat stem sawfly is down from its highs, there appear to be local hotspots. Cereal leaf beetles are expanding their area east of Medicine Hat, but their overall numbers have not hugely increased. The wheat midge survey is currently underway and the results should be available in early January 2009. Any and all updates to insect surveys will be made available on Alberta Agriculture’s web site Ropin the Web.”

Matt Gosling, Premium Ag Services Ltd. – Agri-Trend Agrology Ltd., Wheatland

“From what I’ve seen this year, the rust on wheat hasn’t been as bad as previous years. Barley on barley acres have been the worst for net blotch and scald. There was wheat midge around the Strathmore area, but the damage was fairly low. The late outbreak of lygus bugs hit some growers. I have seen some disease on peas, which was induced by light hail damage. The canola has been quite healthy in this area this year.”

Alvin Stephens, Lakeside Fertilizer, Cypress

“Seedpod weevil will still be an issue in 2009 and wheat midge is definitely on the rise. We’ll have flea beetles in the spring again but no grasshoppers. There is not enough canola being grown down here for clubroot to be an issue.”

Ron Howard, Plant Pathology Management Specialist, Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development

“Disease levels for 2008 were normal or below-normal for most field crops in Southern and South-central Alberta, which bodes well for 2009. However, plant diseases are heavily dependent on weather conditions and are generally more severe in warm, wet and cool, wet seasons. For example, abundant spring moisture in 2008 brought on seedling blight issues and also favored clubroot infection in the counties of Lethbridge, Red Deer, and Yellowhead.

Most of Southern Alberta’s major crop pathogens occur year

in and year out and will resurface again in 2009. These include the seedling blight and root rot pathogens *Pythium*, *Rhizoctonia*, *Gaeumannomyces*, and *Fusarium*, the stem rot pathogens *Sclerotinia* and *Botrytis*, the leaf spot pathogens *Septoria* and *Ascochyta*, the mildew pathogens *Erysiphe* and *Peronospora*, and the head blight pathogens *Claviceps* and *Fusarium*.

Growth and yields of most horticultural and specialty crops were good this year. Dry edible beans had quite a bit of bacterial blight in the early season, but white mould levels were less than usual. Tan spot was severe in several spring and winter wheat fields. Some field pea crops had problems with downy mildew and mycosphaerella blight, while lentils were relatively problem free. *Ascochyta* blight was present in many chickpea fields and may affect this crop again in 2009 if it’s a wet spring.

In 2009 we may see the return of sclerotinia stem rot (canola and pulses), tan spot and septoria (wheat), net blotch and scald (barley), common root rot, take-all root rot, and fusarium head blight (cereals), *ascochyta* blight (chickpea), mycosphaerella blight and powdery mildew (field pea), and leaf spots (forage grasses and legumes). Replanting susceptible crops in fields that were badly infected in 2008 should be avoided.”



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## Alberta

Matthew Stanford, Canola Council of Canada, Chinook

“On the insect front, we have been seeing flea beetles in the Lethbridge, Vauxhall, and Peace regions this fall. These flea beetles are the over-wintering population, so if high numbers were seen when producers were swathing and combining, it may be a good idea to take the extra precaution of buying seed for next spring with the high rate of insecticide seed treatment on it. Cabbage seedpod weevil is slowly working its way northward, with numbers approaching threshold levels around Olds, Rockyford, and other areas north of the #1 highway. Sweeping fields at bolting and early flower stages will help producers determine whether control measures are required. It seems as though the outbreak of bertha armyworm is about finished in Western Canada, but vigilance will be important as things can sometimes pop up in one field and not in another. Where root-maggot populations were high this year, producers should consider increasing seeding rates slightly, as higher plant populations help canola compensate for root maggot damage. Alternatively, producers could take a look at what they do on their farm to get more plants per square foot without increasing the seeding rate, such as reducing seeding speed to attain better seed placement or waiting until soils warm up to at least five degrees Celsius before seeding. There are no registered control products for root maggot in canola.

Rhizoctonia and other seedling diseases will cause problems for 2009's canola if we have cool conditions again. Proper fungicide seed treatment and seeding into soils warmer than five degrees Celsius will help reduce the effects of seedling diseases. Later in the season, warm, wet conditions during the two-week period leading up to first flower will be ideal for apothecia (sclerotinia mushroom) development. If warm, wet conditions persist into early flower, spraying a fungicide between 20 and 50 per cent bloom will be a producer's best defense against this potentially very destructive disease. On the clubroot front, the number of counties in Alberta with confirmed cases will undoubtedly rise in 2009 as research scientists, agronomists, and producers increase their monitoring efforts. The findings do not necessarily indicate that clubroot is spreading, but rather that we are getting better at isolating new cases.” 

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