

Fresh from the Farm
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Applications for Emergency Loans Being Accepted by Farm Service Agencies

Jim Montgomery with Farm Service Agency, Sumter, reminds farmers that applications for Emergency (EM) loans for damages and losses caused by a severe ice storm in January are now being accepted. The storm took place from January 26 through 30, 2004. According to Ken Rentiers, State Executive Director of Farm Service Agency, several counties in South Carolina were named by President Bush as eligible for loans to cover losses resulting from this disaster declaration. Both Lee and Clarendon County FSA offices are accepting applications.

As a general rule, a farmer must have suffered at least a 30% loss of normal production in a single enterprise, be able to repay the loan and any other loans, be unable to obtain credit elsewhere, and have adequate security, Rentiers said. The expiration date for filing applications under this emergency designation is October 13, 2004, but farmers should apply as soon as possible. The Lee County Office, which services both Lee and Sumter Counties, is located at 129 Fairview Avenue, Bishopville. The Clarendon County Office is located at 7 Rigby Street in Manning.

State Tobacco Pathologist Warns Growers to Plan for Disease Again

Dr. Bruce Fortnum, Clemson Extension plant pathologist, wants tobacco growers to know if our current dry weather continues, we could experience another severe problem with TSWV (tomato spotted wilt virus) that was tough on tobacco plus a host of other crops in 2002 to include tomatoes and peppers in S.C. Again this season, Syngenta Inc. was petitioned to support a third party label authorizing use of the product Actigard

to help fight the disease, should it run rampant as it did in 2002. TSWV problems have occurred over a number of dry years but was unusually bad in 2002. Heavy losses of tobacco and tomatoes were prevalent in the state that year.

The disease pathogen is carried by at least two species of tiny thrips insects in the state, and thrips are generally problems themselves (sucking plant juices) during dry seasons in cotton and other crops. The tomato variety breeders have managed to combat the problem with biotechnology utilizing a resistant gene (so far) to keep the disease from spreading when pathogen-toting thrips feed on the plant tissue. Tobacco companies have not been so fortunate yet, so the use of other preventative measures should be taken to deal with the problem such as the use of the product Actigard (which is a chemical that stimulates the plant's natural defense responses). Even though Actigard is not 100% effective, it has proven to be helpful, and Dr. Fortnum feels it could play a valuable role in reducing the disease. He says farmers who experienced those high losses in 2002 should seriously consider using the product. The Flue-Cured Stabilization Service has agreed again this season to act as the third party labeling channel.

Dr. Fortnum suggests several points for tobacco growers to consider in attempting to control the problem: Avoid planting early; Apply Admire or Platinum as a tray drench in tobacco greenhouses; use healthy disease free seedlings to reduce stand loss to other pathogens; follow fertility recommendations (avoid excess nitrogen); irrigate if possible (many can not do this) to assure sustained crop growth; and consider use of Actigard if expectation of disease loss is high.

Homeowners should be aware of the same problem in pepper, potato and tomato plants if dry weather continues. It was getting cloudy while this article was being

prepared on Thursday afternoon, so rainfall will be beneficial this time for more than one reason. Harold McLamb, Lee County Extension director, emeritus, provides our local office with unofficial rainfall data. This data lends credence to Dr. Fortnum's concern. Looking at rainfall received in Bishopville during 1994-2004 from the months of January thru March, we are currently way behind. The average of those 11 years for the month of March is 4.4 inches. This March we have received only 0.39 inches. The average cumulative amount received from January thru March for those same 11 years is 13.19 inches. Ending this March we have received 7.26 inches. Watch out for the thrips!

There are at least two resistant tomato varieties available this season, and possibly more on the market for TSWV management. The two popular varieties at present with the TSWV gene are Amelia from Harris-Moran and BHN 444 from BHN Seeds. If you use these varieties in the home garden, there should be no need to have to spray for thrips, which should be a plus for your pocket book and the environment. Keep in mind, these varieties are limited in resistance to other diseases. Amelia is also a good choice if nematodes are a problem. A new popular pepper variety with the TSWV resistant gene is Stiletto from Roger's Seeds.

Dr. Tony Keinath, Extension vegetable plant pathologist at Charleston, has some comments about the disease in the vegetable host crops. He states that thrips may pick up the pathogen from host weeds around the field or garden borders, and these weeds could be dandelion(got plenty of these at my place), annual sowthistle, buttercup, chickweed(got lots of these too), and plantain. These are the most common hosts found to be important to thrips' over-wintering in a recent study in North Carolina. Obviously, getting rid of these before setting tomatoes will help. You'll be hearing more about this.