

News Release

For immediate release

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Urgent Action Needed By Farmers To Manage Exploding Spring Grass Grub Populations

Significantly higher than normal populations of two-year lifecycle and late feeding annual grass grubs in Canterbury, Otago and Southland are likely to cause serious and costly damage to pasture and cereal crops this spring.

Normally grass grub damage occurs from March through to early June. This year it is likely there will be another burst of damage in spring by those grubs that need to continue to feed to complete their development. That will happen when the soil is warmed up around mid to late September through October and into November.

A late summer dry spell and cold autumn and winter conditions are tagged as the cause of the problem.

Those working in the field report that this year, two-year lifecycle and late feeding annual populations make up about 20 percent of grass grubs whereas they would normally account for 5-10 percent.

Numbers of around 200-1000 grubs per square metre are being reported, which is significantly higher than normal.

At greatest risk is autumn drilled pasture and the pasture and crops that couldn't be drilled in autumn and are now being sown in spring. Grass grub has the potential to destroy new pasture just as it is being established leading to feed loss and loss in production.

Farmers are being urged to get out into their paddocks to assess the populations and larval stage of grass grubs.

AgResearch's Richard Townsend urges farmers to take this risk very seriously.

"What we are seeing is quite a high number of late feeding annual grubs and also some two-year lifecycle grubs so there is potential for a high level of damage this spring."

Nufarm research and development officer Cynthia Christie says farmers will not be expecting such high numbers of grass grubs at this time of the year and it's vital anyone renovating pasture is adding an insecticide at drilling.

"Unless farmers go and dig in their paddocks they won't immediately recognise what is causing problems with their pasture. They'll see they have damage and by then it is usually too late."

She says some people will get hit now with late feeding grass grub larvae, and later with the two-year larvae – all before the normal grass grub season hits.

“This year in southern regions there will be these waves of damaging grass grub populations hitting us instead of just one.

“We already have cases where we don’t need to dig to see the problem. We can just pull back the turf as the roots have completely gone.”

AgResearch’s Richard Townsend explains that normally grass grubs have a one year lifecycle with adults emerging in mid to late spring when they lay eggs. The larvae develop over the summer and autumn and then go down the soil profile in late winter where they pupate in the early spring and emerge late spring as new adults.

However, grass grub larvae have to get to a minimum weight before they pupate and they will sometimes continue to feed into spring until they get to that stage even if that means delayed pupation and late emergence as adults.

The two-year life cycle grass grub are larvae that haven’t sufficiently developed by autumn so spend winter as non feeding second instar larvae. This is typically caused by cold weather conditions or lack of food in March, April and May.

These larvae begin feeding again and change to the damaging third instar in the spring. Feeding, and therefore damage, continues through spring and is generally finished by early summer. There is little or no feeding during autumn and winter with pupation occurring at the normal time the following spring. It takes these grubs two years to complete their lifecycle instead of one year.

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