



Ag department official plagued by a summer of grasshoppers

By Shelley Smith

The 'hoppers were all over this summer, as Nebraska reported the largest infestation of grasshoppers since the 1930s, according to the State Agriculture Department.

Richard Fitzsimmons, deputy director, said the grasshopper situation this past spring and summer was the worst he had seen in 20 years.

He said large infestations have been reported on a semi-regular basis once every 20 years.

He said while this was only a theory, there are several known reasons for the large number of the plant-eating insects.

One, he said, was because of the recent increase in regulation of effective chemicals.

He said many of the pesticides used to control past grasshopper infestations have been taken off the market because of the dangers to both the users and the plants.

Another reason he cited was the Nebraska spring. He said the early spring was cool and wet and moved into a hot, dry summer very rapidly.

"This is ideal for grasshoppers. They carry a bacteria that when dampened, grows," he added.

He said attempts to control the situation were made as soon as they realized it would be a record-breaking summer for grasshoppers.

"We tried to get the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) to release the use of heptachlor for emergency use,"

he said.

Heptachlor is a strong, effective chemical used in preventing the bacteria growth, but it is very dangerous, he said.

He said although the EPA denied the request, they did release the use of five other chemicals that have short term effects.

"The problem with these is that they don't carry enough lasting potency to do much good," he said.

He said the department did spray 195,796 acres of only rangeland with the pesticides, but this was only 20 percent of the range land affected.

He said coverage was minimal because the rancher or farmer must have signed up for the spraying in spring, and he said people didn't realize the possible seriousness of the grasshopper problem.

He said, however, that people are already signing up for next year, and they expect to spray nearly one million acres of rangeland.

He said there is an agriculture appropriations bill being considered to allot \$5 million for cropland spraying. Cropland wasn't sprayed last year because of a lack of funds, he said.

If passed, he said, the agriculture department would match the funds to begin the program, and an expected 2 million acres of cropland would be sprayed.

Although the 20-year theory won't be in effect next year, he said the agriculture department is planning for the worst, just in case.

German student . . .

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He does not spend as much time reading newspapers as he should, he said, but he still understands the world situation.

Part of the difference could be the emphasis on foreign language in Europe and the de-emphasis in America, he said. It is also easier to visit foreign countries in Europe.

He can travel to another country in the same time it takes a Nebraskan to go to Iowa, Kansas or Colorado.

Besides traveling all over Europe he worked in Egypt through the AIESEC program.

He said after working there, he appreciated the modern conveniences he had in Germany and the United States.

"During 6½ weeks, I had one hot shower," he said, "and that was after a tennis match at the German Embassy."

He believed his traveling will help him in business because he will understand the business law of other countries, and it will help him in the world because he will understand people better.

He could be making more money if he had stayed in Germany, he said, but he considers his experiences more valuable.

When he begins a job in Germany, he will probably be there until he is 62 or 65, he said. He said he is ready to try things now because he knows some day he may not be able to.

"I took the chance," he said, "and I am really content to have done it."

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