

Suwannee Valley Watermelon Crop Update- May 19, 2019

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Focus This Upcoming Week: Irrigation

Disease and Insect update:

- We have found a few more anthracnose infested fields, but very few. I am only aware of 6-8 fields with anthracnose. So, those that have it confirmed should have already sprayed with Quadris Top. Those who do not have it should not need to spray with Quadris Top “just for the heck of it.”
- We still see many mild cases of bacterial leaf spot (*Xanthomonas* or *Pseudomonas*) and gummy stem blight, but both seem to be at low levels and not progressing very much, except where overhead irrigation has been used. I am hoping these two diseases will stay “quiet” assuming no rain.
- All of us would agree, *Fusarium* wilt has continued to express itself much longer in this season than we would expect. But, there is still no control measures at this time on the season.
- The rindworm complex (several species involved) are beginning to be seen and somewhat active. As in my past notes, I would include a spray of Intrepid or Coragen if not already added.

High Temperatures and Irrigation Plans:

As everyone knows, we expect a stretch of 7-10 days of unusually high temperatures, in the upper 90s for several days. This is going to drive evapotranspiration to very high levels and likely to levels of water uptake that we are not used to seeing. We already saw significant increases last week and most growers doubled (more or less) their irrigation to keep up with increased demand. Many growers who had been keeping up with one event per day switched to two events per day, or if already on two events per day had to increase the length of each cycle. Hopefully everyone has some type of soil moisture sensors or monitoring program helping you to guide these changes. In all seriousness, do not be surprised if we need to go to three shorter cycles per day to keep the soil in the rooting zone (top 18 inches) replenished. What will happen this coming week is that the plants will deplete the water quickly in the top 18 inches and you need to replace that water frequently. It will be more labor, of course, but YOU CAN'T Let the vines go down in this type of heat. There also is no reason we can't do this with drip irrigation alone if the system is designed properly and kept clean. The use of overhead irrigation is almost always resulting in a flare up of disease. Overhead should only be considered if the drip system is not working properly. The plants have to pick up water to “cool” the plant and if the water is not available, the plant can't cool itself including not able to keep the fruit cooled.

I know many are already considering a spray for coverage of some type of white kaolin clay or other similar material to protect the fruit in situations where the vine coverage is minimal. If this is to be done, make plans in advance.

We have an excellent regional irrigation specialist, Charles Barrett, who can help you with questions. Let me know if you need to reach out to Charles.