

Suwannee Valley Watermelon Crop Update- May 5, 2019

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Reminder: Suwannee Valley Watermelon Grower Field Day

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/suwannee-valley-watermelon-grower-field-day-registration-61064098362>

Monday, May 13, 2019; 5:30- 8:00 pm

Trolley Tour of 6 watermelon research trials (5:30-7:30 pm)

Dinner (7:30-8:00 pm)

Pesticide Applicator and Certified Crop Advisor CEUs available

Location NFREC-Suwannee Valley, 8202 CR 417, Live Oak FL 32060

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The watermelon crops the past week continued to progress very well. The weather continued to be very favorable for excellent fruit set and fruit expansion. We have been on the lookout for foliar diseases, but still have seen very little activity from common diseases. The rains Friday and Sunday could provide conditions favorable for infection, but overall the plants look very clean. Many long time farmers have commented on how unusually disease-free we have been to date. We will update everyone as soon as we see anything confirmed. Remember, if you suspect a disease getting started, we have plant disease labs (campus and Quincy) to confirm diseases. Until then, my suggestion is to stay with Chlorothalonil (Bravo or other generic) if fruit is not too large for risk of chlorothalonil burn; or mancozeb (Manzate or Penncozeb or other) as the main cover preventative fungicide. Once fruit get half grown or so, you should drop chlorothalonil from the program due to risk of fruit burn. I suggest adding Quintec or Torino as a preventative spray for powdery mildew if you have not started that addition. Most of what we saw on older leaves down in the crown area was old sand-blasted, wind-burned leaves. Keep a close eye on older leaves and if new active disease spots appear, let us know so we can get any new diseases identified.

We received several questions the past week about strategies for controlling rindworms. The term rindworm is used to describe the caterpillars that feed on the rind of watermelon fruit, but actually the term refers to several species that can feed on the rind. The most common species include corn earworm, several armyworms, cutworms and cabbage looper. The control is basically the same regardless of the species. I have not had any cases reported this year yet, but preparing in advance is advisable. Here is one strategy I have used over the years, with an emphasis on protecting the honeybees and other beneficials. You can start a preventative spray program with one of the Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) materials such as Dipel, Xentari, Javelin, Deliver, Agree, and others. The Bt materials are very safe to bees and are good at controlling very small, first instar caterpillars after the hatch and first feed on the leaves. If we get reports of rindworm feeding and higher pressure, then better spray choices may include Intrepid as a spray or Coragen as a spray. Don't use Coragen as an injection via drip for rindworms because Coragen does not move sufficiently through the root system to the fruit. Do not use pyrethroids for control of rindworms as there is a very high level of resistance to that class and they are

very toxic to bees. I do not suggest using multiple active ingredient materials, such as Besiege, because of its inclusion of a pyrethroid as one of the ingredients.

Tissue testing or petiole-sap testing should be used to fine tune fertilizer injection rates being used. Unless a very young field, most applications now should be at about 2.0 to 2.5 lbs of nitrogen and potash per acre per day to result in optimum levels.