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Find 'em and spray 'em is battle plan against Mormon Crickets

Meeting lays out game plan to fight advancing infestation

By David Sykes

Money for spraying, and volunteers for finding and mapping their locations, is the battle plan to fight the incoming infestation of Mormon Crickets, officials said at a meeting last week in Ione.

Extension agents Larry Lutchter from Morrow and Jordan Maley from Gilliam Counties, along with entomologist Todd Adams from the Oregon Department of Agriculture in Hermiston, all said there is no time to waste if Morrow County wants to control the crickets now moving east from Gilliam County, where they have been dealing with a major infestation since 2017.

"I have had ten to fifteen calls this week from producers who are working in the fields who have seen the crickets," Lutchter told the crowd of farmers, ranchers and others gathered at the Ione Park last Thursday evening for a special Mormon Cricket meeting. Lutchter says the crickets have been reported along Ione Gooseberry Road, in several locations on Juniper Canyon, one mile north of the Lexington Grange, and on rangeland on Hinton Creek just east of Heppner. "They are here," he emphasized.

The meeting was called by Lutchter to map out a strategy for keeping the infestation under control. The two things needed most are money and knowing where the infestations are located. Volunteers can help with finding them, and money from federal, state and local sources is being sought to pay for the spraying once the "hot spots" are identified.

The Mormon Crickets have been a big problem in Gilliam County since 2017 when they came off rangeland in Ladd and Blalock Canyons and moved not only into farm and range ground, but also into the city of Arlington. "I lived through that, and no one should have to experience it," said April Aamodt of Arlington who self-educated herself and is a volunteer expert on the Mormon Cricket (see related story).

The crickets not only took over the city of Arlington, but also began doing extensive damage to agricultural land, reportedly taking out ten percent of one large Gilliam wheat farmer's crop. Morrow County officials don't want that happening here,



Todd Adams, Entomologist (left) with the Oregon Dept of Agriculture in Hermiston, explains the life cycle of the Mormon Cricket at a meeting last week in Ione. With him is Morrow County Extension Agent Larry Lutchter and Morrow County Commissioner Jim Doherty. -Photo by David Sykes.

so Lutchter has enlisted the help of Maley and others to lay out a game plan to fight them.

The first step is for county residents to understand the Mormon Cricket. The insect has seven stages of development, Adams explained. Mating and egg laying under the earth by females is in the summer, with the eggs dormant over the winter. In early spring around the middle of March when soil temperatures reach 40 degrees they begin to hatch. In the early development stages, the crickets begin moving locally looking for food, then later band together and migrate over large distances.

"They are less than a half-inch in the first young stage, and they hard to see," Adams said. He said when first spotted it can look to observers "like the ground is moving." Adams says the crickets can move a half mile per day and go 50 miles in a season. "When they are moving, they are banding in the adult stage and mating and looking for where to lay their eggs." He said the females will lay 85 -100 eggs each in seven-day intervals. "They will lay eggs, move on lay more eggs, move again and lay more. The following spring when the temperature reaches 40 degrees, they hatch out of the ground and feed on forage," Adams said.

The best time to kill the crickets, experts say, is after they hatch but before they reach adulthood. The chemical of choice is Dimilin which keeps the young insects from molting their skin which kills them. "They put an oil in with chemical and it hits the plant, sticks to it, then the cricket comes

along and eats it," Adams explained. He also said it isn't necessary to treat every acre for spraying to be effective. With a 1,000-acre tract you can treat 500 and as they move through, they will eat and if they are not in a sprayed area they will eventually make it into a treated area. That way you use half the chemical and treat half the area," he said. Adams said Dimilin will stay on plants for a week or two and can handle rain, just not flood irrigation. The spray is fine for livestock and only targets insects. It can be sprayed on rangeland and cows and sheep can eat it, but it cannot be sprayed on crop land. Once they reach adulthood then a bait poison like Sevin must be used, which is not as environmentally friendly or effective, he pointed out.

Maley is familiar with the cost of spraying as Gilliam County has been doing it for a number of years. He said the cost is around \$2.80 an acre for chemicals and \$6 for aerial application. He said it can be applied on the ground with a side by side "relatively cheap." Maley says the best thing Morrow County can do is try and secure chemical now because there may be problems in the supply chain for agricultural chemicals. He said Gilliam bought 3,000 lbs. of bait and enough Dimilin to do 12,000 acres. "Otherwise, you could end up in the spring not getting the chemical." He said it was important to get bait also because in Morrow County people aren't going to know they have the crickets for a while, and "all of a sudden they (the crickets) are adults, and the spray doesn't work." Lutchter said the best thing we can do in Morrow County with the

new infestations coming in is to kill them when they are young since once they are adults you have to bait because they weren't found when they were young.

Gilliam County has been working with Lexington sprayer John Boyer for several years now on its spraying program, and Maley says he has been doing a great job. Boyer said he will bring in additional pilots if needed to handle the spraying once it gets going in Morrow County. County Commissioner Jim Doherty said he is working on several funding sources including federal, state and local to pay for a spraying program in the county.

But Doherty and the other officials admit Morrow faces different problems than Gilliam County in starting a spraying program. Here we have several large landowners such as the 55,000-acre Navy bombing range in the middle of the county, the Bureau of Land Management owning land in the county as well as a large parcel owned by the Nature Conservatory which adheres to a natural land use policy of no chemicals. There are also many irrigated crop circles in north county, some of them organic which cannot use chemicals.

At the end of the meeting, officials said action must be taken soon to prepare to fight the coming cricket infestation. "Next spring we're going to have to be geared up and ready to do something," said Doherty, who has been heading up the county commission efforts on the problem. Maley urged everyone at the meeting to enter contact information on a signup sheet he passed around, saying he will call another meeting in December to work more on plans to fight the cricket, and he urged people in Morrow County to be on the lookout for them. There will soon be a system set up for reporting infestations so spraying can be planned. He said if crickets are spotted for people to first make sure they have geo locating turned on their phone, then take a picture and send it to him with a text of where they are located. That information will be put on a map and become part of the management area.

Arlington woman takes on Mormon Cricket

Super volunteer does Animal Planet segment about Arlington infestation



April Aamodt (left) with her sister Penny Krebs holds poster of the Mormon Cricket.

By David Sykes

An Arlington woman got so disgusted with the Mormon Cricket infestation there, that she voluntarily took on a fight that landed her spot on an Animal Planet TV special about the insects.

Aamodt said the crickets invaded Arlington in 2017 and "they were everywhere. It was disgusting." She tells the story of what tipped her over the edge and made her start fighting the crickets. "I had a pickup and I had just hauled some pigs with some carrots in the back. I washed out the truck and those crickets came in. I turned my back for about 30 seconds turned back around and those carrots were gone, that is how fast they can eat something," she relates.

Since then, Aamodt, who has a day job as she puts it with the Gilliam County District Attorney's office, has become somewhat of an expert on the cricket. She has self-taught herself not only about the insect's life cycle, but also different ways to kill them. "We did a study and

put some of them in an aquarium. They like spinach, and corn on the cob is gone in seconds," she says. Attending a recent meeting in Ione about how to fight the crickets (see related story), Aamodt was praised by Gilliam County Extension Agent Jordan Maley for the volunteer work she has done. "If you have people like April who are willing to deal with this, it is going to help a lot because April has given us a capacity we would not have," Maley said in urging Morrow County people to volunteer in locating the insects. "I would say we have fifty percent more capacity than we would have without April. If you can find people like April or several, it's going to take several because she is a ball of fire," he said in encouraging volunteers.

Aamodt's self-taught knowledge about the cricket landed her a spot on the TV show Animal Planet, Intruders. "This six-part series reveals real-life stories of homeowners fighting back to reclaim their

-See ARLINGTON WOMAN PAGE TWO



The April Aamodt photo (above) that went viral and got her on Animal Planet

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