

Pasture mealybug brief

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Don't panic the pasture mealybug *Heliococcus summervillei* Brookes (Hemiptera: Coccoomorpha: Psuedococcidae) has **NOT** been confirmed in Arkansas at this time. In the U.S. this invasive pest was first reported in Texas in October 2025 and is now confirmed in 70 Texas counties. After the Texas confirmation it spread into Louisiana (Sept/Oct. 2025) and Florida (May 2026). It currently infests 14 Louisiana parishes and 16 Florida counties. The pasture mealybug is a pest of multiple pasture grasses as well as sugarcane. This insect was first described in Australia in the 1920s.

The pasture mealybug adults are from 2-5 mm long with a short anal tube and covered in a white waxy coat. The feeding/damaging stage are nymphs that are as small as 1mm in early stages. Immature mealybugs feed by sucking plant sap and will excrete honeydew over the leaves that promote the growth of sooty-mold that can block photosynthesis. Much of the damage caused by pasture mealybugs is the result of toxic saliva injected into the plant during feeding. This will weaken the plant and make it more susceptible to infection with plant pathogens. Pasture mealybug feeding and infection with plant pathogens may result in "pasture dieback" which kills the grass.

Favorable conditions for increased pasture mealybug populations and damage include high humidity, high temperature and ample rainfall. Females survive the winter and/or dry conditions in the soil. Pasture mealybugs may be moved from infested to uninfested fields through machinery, clothing, cattle or possibly by wind.

In Texas, pasture mealybugs infest and damage Bermudagrass, Bahiagrass, Johnsongrass, sorghum-sudangrass, bluestem grass as well as St. Augustine turfgrass. They may also infest other species of warm season grasses. It also infests sugarcane in Louisiana and Florida; and has been reported to infest rice in India.

Symptoms of a pasture mealybug infestation usually occur within a week of infestation. Infested grass will become yellowed and discolored followed by purpling or reddening of the leaves. Plants may also appear stunted and drought stressed in spite of ample rainfall; and the root system may be poorly developed. The final stage of "dieback" will be general plant deterioration and infection with secondary infection leading to plant death.

More research is needed to develop effective pasture mealybug management strategies including identification of appropriate insecticides. Cutting or grazing the pastures to

reduce thick grass growth in infested fields has been recommended to decrease favorability to the pest. In addition, early harvesting may be advised in infested fields to maintain hay quality. Currently, there are no EPA labeled products to specifically control pasture mealybugs.

This article is simply a broad overview of the pest and intended to alert producers to notify us of potential infestations in Arkansas. For more detailed information with excellent pictures, I recommend Texas Agrilife Extension's factsheet - The Pasture Mealybug: A New Invasive Pest of Pastures and Hayfields in Texas -

<https://agrillifeextension.tamu.edu/pasture-mealybug/> .