



University of California Cooperative Extension – Kern County

## ***NEWS RELEASE***

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### **False Chinch Bug Invasions in Lower San Joaquin Valley**

The false chinch bug, *Nysius raphanus*, is a small insect that is commonly found within grassy or weedy fields, pastures and foothills. Each spring, once the plants in these fields dry up, false chinch bug migrates to find new places to feed. This becomes a nuisance for homeowners when bugs migrate into their landscapes and homes, and can cause problems for farmers.

False chinch bug populations in 2010 are much higher than normal. This is due to our above average rainfall this spring that has resulted in a large amount of weeds and grasses in areas with natural vegetation. Additionally, relatively cool spring and early summer weather this year have prolonged the survival of these plants and therefore allowed for greater increases in false chinch bug populations. Now that these plants are drying, false chinch bugs are looking for a new place to feed.

False chinch bug adults are grayish-brown, slender, and about 3 millimeters long. Immature stages lack wings and have the appearance of coffee grounds. Both immature and adult false chinch bugs feed on plants through a proboscis. This straw-like structure is used to probe into plant tissue and drink up plant fluids. This type of feeding can cause severe damage to plants that are unable to compensate for lost leaf tissues and fluids.

In normal years, false chinch bugs are considered only a pest of seedlings. Larger annual plants and established perennials have sufficient size to be relatively unaffected by attacks against them. This year, though, the sheer numbers of these pests are causing alarm for farmers and homeowners alike. Homeowners have been particularly hard hit, as waves of these insects completely envelop garden and landscape plants. Some homeowners have stated that it appears that the ground is moving. Small false chinch bugs are also often able to get underneath sliding screen patio doors and enter into homes where they become a nuisance.

Farmers in general should not be alarmed by the bugs. Exceptions would be growers with young annual broadleaf crops or young fruit trees. Aggregations of false chinch bugs can result in plant and tree decline, and there have been reports of these bugs killing young almond, pistachio and citrus trees. Young

trees can essentially be sucked dry by the constant probing and feeding from this pest. The decline of young trees is often so rapid that the presence of a toxin in false chinch bugs has been hypothesized. Farmers with significant false chinch bug populations and young trees should consider insecticide treatments, particularly on the edges of fields from which the bugs are migrating.

Homeowners and pest control companies that treat around homes have very few options for controlling false chinch bug. The most common control method is to treat the perimeter around a home with a broad spectrum insecticide, such as those marketed at home improvement stores as ‘perimeter’ or ‘home defense’ products. However, these products have very short residual, meaning that they can save you from insects in your yard today, but have little effect on those that arrive tomorrow. It is also good advice for homeowners to make sure that the screens on patio doors are intact and used to prevent these insects from entering homes. ■