

## IN THE GARDEN

# Common issues

By: Scott Eckert

With vegetable gardening comes insect issues. Sometimes bug problems are high and sometimes they are low, depending on the year. One thing is for certain, squash bugs always find me! Squash bugs are a devastating pest that uses its piercing-sucking mouthparts to feed on many varieties of cucurbits including squash, pumpkin, watermelon and cantaloupe. Damage from these pests can cause wilt and even death to the host plant.

Adult squash bugs are greyish-brown and have wings that lay flat over the back. They have orange-brown stripes on the underside of

the body. Nymphs are small and greenish with black legs but turn greyish-brown as they develop. Nymphs do not have wings but wing development may be noticeable as they age.

Unmated adults overwinter in plant debris. From late April through May the adults emerge, mate and find a host plant. Female adults lay clusters of brownish-red eggs over several weeks on the underside of leaves. Within two weeks the eggs hatch and nymphs begin to feed on their host plant. Nymphs reach maturity in 4 to 6 weeks when they mate and begin a second generation during the same growing season. Adults from this generation will

overwinter to lay eggs the following year.

The hard body of the adult squash bug is difficult to penetrate making control during the nymph stage essential. Regularly monitor plants for signs of squash bugs. Remove plant debris to disrupt overwintering habitats. General use insecticides such as permethrin (Bug-B-Gon Multipurpose Garden Dust; Green Thumb Multipurpose Garden and Pet Dust; Bug-No-More Yard and Garden Insect Spray; Eight Vegetable, Fruit and Flower Concentrate; Garden and Farm Insect Control; Lawn & Garden Insect Killer), malathion, and methoxychlor provide control if a direct application is



Squash bugs can decimate a crop. WIKIMEDIA/CCLI 2.0

made to young, soft-bodied squash bugs. Contact with the nymphs is required for control so be sure to spray the undersides of the leaves.

- Scott Eckert is Kansas State Research and Extension Agent for Harvey County. Horticulture is his specialty.

# Even in Kansas cattle country, locals are opposing a mega feedlot

By: Calen Moore  
KANSAS NEWS SERVICE

PAWNEE COUNTY, Kansas — The western side of Kansas is a great place to produce beef.

It has wide open spaces that seem to go on forever and low humidity. The region has embraced its beef culture and is now home to 75% of the state's feedlots. These facilities are where cattle are sent to be fed a high-energy diet to gain weight before being sent to a beef packing plant.

Outside of small towns these feedlots look like miles of fences with cattle standing end to end. But some people have started to be wary of these expansive developments.

"It's good to live in beef country, as long as it ain't too close. They're able to stir up enough dust and stink," Merrill Cauble said.

Cauble is a farmer who lives near the town of Larned in Pawnee County. He has been skeptical of the increase of feedlots near where he lives.

**Pushing back against the norm**

The company Innovative Livestock Solutions has feedlots across central Kansas and Nebraska. There are three in Pawnee County with a combined capacity of 72,000 cattle.

They are looking to expand and proposed a new facility that can hold 88,000 cattle. That's a lot of livestock for a county with only about 6,000 people. It would be one of the biggest feedlots in Kansas.

All those animals are estimated to produce over

5 million pounds of manure every day. Beef cattle eat high protein diets, which can produce nitrogen heavy manure. That poses a risk if it gets into waterways or seeps into the aquifer underground where people get their drinking water.

"It's not going to do the community any good whatsoever, and that's why we decided to push back," Cauble said.

After the Kansas Department of Health and Environment reviewed the feedlot's plans, the agency held a public hearing in Larned to see what the town had to say about it.

Cauble teamed up with the Kansas Sierra Club, an environmental advocacy group. The duo along with those critical of another huge feedlot were vocal about their concerns to KDHE.

"These feed yards have been polluting our waters for years, and their recommendations haven't improved the problem to the extent to where we have safe nitrate levels," Cauble said.

They gained quite the following of locals questioning the safety of another large feedlot near the community.

**Something in the water**  
Pawnee County and other central Kansas counties already have an established history of high nitrate levels in their groundwater.

The soil in this region is very sandy, so things can easily leak through. The community also sits above the Ogallala aquifer. Towns like Larned rely almost exclusively on the

aquifer for drinking water.

Late last year, student researchers from three Kansas colleges found that nitrate levels in private wells in south-central Kansas are as much as five times higher than Environmental Protection Agency limits for healthy drinking water, which is 10 milligrams per liter.

High nitrate levels in water can cause "blue baby syndrome" where children under six months have their blood deprived of oxygen. There are also some studies that link high nitrate levels with increased risk of some colon and kidney cancers.

The researchers say the pollution is likely due to fertilizer leaking into the groundwater. But some Larned residents believe that fresh feedlot manure is contributing to that as well, but it's not clear if that has been proven.

According to the EPA, Kansas ranks second in the nation in estimated area with higher levels of nitrates in drinking water than permissible.

The EPA estimates that 5% of Kansans have private, unregulated water wells.

Kansas State University student Chase Glasscock said most of those Kansans are farmers who keep the economy going, and neglecting their needs could hurt the state.

"If we're not taking care of them, then we're not taking care of ourselves," Glasscock said when presenting his data to the public in November.

**Response from the health department and company**

KDHE said in an email

that the reason the ILS feedlot was approved was because it met all the statutory and regulatory requirements. But the agency did acknowledge the elevated risk the region has due to its soil composition.

To try and address the community's concerns, KDHE provided stricter guidelines than the minimum to control pollution. That includes seepage requirements for the manure lagoon and protections for groundwater much greater than required by state law.

"We are committed to our role in protecting the environment but also acknowledge that owners of feeding facilities have

rights that have been set in law. We are only able to enforce requirements that we have jurisdiction over," KDHE spokesperson Mitchell Osterlund said.

ILS also expressed an interest to go above and beyond and adhere to more stringent standards tailored to this unique situation.

ILS sent Jon Skelton, their chief financial officer, to the meeting to calm the waters.

Skelton told the attendees that a significant number of ILS shareholders live locally within or near the county.

ILS didn't respond to a request for comment.

There have been proponents of the feedlot

who have been surprised by the negative backlash. A few spoke at the public hearing and have been trying to make the case that this feedlot will create economic opportunities.


It's estimated that the feedlot will create 70 jobs for the town, but also could provide a strong market for nearby farmers and agribusinesses.

Pawnee County has been steadily losing its population for decades. Some here are eager for new business and development.

In a press release, ILS estimated it will contribute approximately \$50 million in added valuation to Pawnee County's tax base.


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