Cool dry conditions have prevailed over the area over the past two weeks holding insect and disease pressure at fairly low levels. Daytime temperatures have been in the upper 60’s to mid 70’s – upper 70’s while the mercury has ranged in the upper 40’s to mid 50's at night. The cool night temperatures are reportedly holding back cucurbits, watermelons in particular. The FAWN weather station at Immokalee recorded 0.10 inches of rain on March 14 - 15th. Up to 0.60 inches of rain were reported south of Immokalee and east into Lee County. The extremely dry conditions that have prevailed since January have resulted in a significant drop in water tables and some growers are reporting difficulty in maintaining adequate soil moisture conditions. The area experienced several days of high winds between March 11 – 14th. Some growers are reporting minor damage to beans, specialty crops, vine crops and tomatoes. This was largely restricted to leaf tearing and desiccation, with some minor fruit damage on tomato being reported.

TYLCV is widely present on tomato across the area. In general, the incidence of infection is still low but from all reports appears to be slowly increasing with 3 – 5% infection rates being reported widely. This is up from the 1 - 2% average reported in the last hotline. A few fields have reached 10 -15% infection levels. Several respondents are reporting the continued appearance of new infections despite very low whitefly counts. A number of growers are indicating a strong edge effect with new infections beginning at field margins. Growers are urged to maintain their vigilance in combating this disease and its whitefly vector to avoid the buildup of TYLCV to levels being observed in other areas of the state. Cleanup of old fields and rouging infected plants combined with effective whitefly control cannot be stressed to strongly. For more information on TYLCV and whitefly management contact the Hendry County Extension Office.

Pepper weevil populations are still high and seem to be increasing from many reports, although a few growers have reported some moderation in weevil pressure over the past two weeks. Weevil counts are highest in older fields and in specialty peppers. See the P&D Hotline for March 4, 1998 for control tips.

Scattered occurrences of southern and beet-army worms have been noted. Melon worms are also being reported from several locations on cucurbits. Counts are low and damage minimal in most instances.

Spider mites are being noted from several areas on cucurbits. Infestations are most common along dry dusty field margins and roadways. Numbers are low but with a warming trend likely, dry conditions may favor the buildup of mite populations.
Scattered reports of broad mite on pepper continue to be received. Some increase in numbers has been noted. Incidence in any given field is spotty. Depending on conditions, populations may begin to build as warmer weather returns to the area.

Gummy stem blight, downy mildew and powdery mildew are being seen widely on cucurbits. Gummy stem and powdery mildew activity has been rather low over the last few weeks. Incidence is generally low.

Powdery mildew is most active in older squash plantings. Downy mildew has been more active over the period and several growers are reporting new infections. The disease has been most active on cantaloupes and specialty melons. Dr. Tom Kucharek, Plant Pathologist at UF/IFAS has indicated that Quadris has received a Federal Section 3 label on cucurbits and potatoes among other crops but that labeling is still pending in Florida. Updates will be provided as information is received.

Downy mildew is also widely present on cole crops across the area. Incidence is high in some fields and crop damage low to moderate.

Late blight remains widely present on potato around the region. Infection levels are low to moderate. Reports indicate that the disease appears seems to be under control in most fields with little active sporulation being noted in most fields. The potato crop is nearing completion with many fields having already been harvested and the balance scheduled to be desiccated in the next few weeks.

No new reports of late blight have been reported on tomato. Note: Florida has been granted Emergency Exemption Section 18 label for Tattoo C to control late blight on tomato. This expires May 20, 1999.

High whitefly counts are being reported from a number of locations on cucurbits, eggplants, potatoes, and tomatoes, while in other locations respondents are noting very low whitefly populations especially in tomato. The situation is rather mixed up but is of major concern due to the presence of TYLCV throughout the area.

Isolated cases of other viral diseases including tobacco mosaic, tomato mottle, and potato Y in tomato and watermelon mosaic on watermelon have been reported. Incidence and severity is low.

Leaf miner numbers are down. Most respondents indicate that leaf miner counts are down and leaf miners are currently under control, although there have been some reports of problems on younger fields of tomato.

Sporadic, low levels of aphids have been observed in a number of areas on brassicas, cucurbits, pepper, potato and tomato. Populations seem to be increasing slowly, with some movement being noted from desiccated potato fields to remaining green fields.

A few flights of thrips have been noted in east Naples and the Devils garden area. These are reported to be largely F. bispinosa, with some reports of T. palmae. For the most part, thrips counts are low. There has been one report of very high numbers of T. palmae on watermelon, where it is believed that they moved over from potatoes, which had been desiccated.

Very little foliar disease is being reported on pepper and tomato. There have been a few isolated reports of bacterial spot activity following the blowing rain on March. Some growers are reporting some low levels of target spot/gray mold on the inside of tomatoes where vines are thick and fungicide penetration is restricted. Scattered light occurrence of early blight has also been reported.

Contributors include: Kathy Carabiener/Sieverts, Fred Heald/Farmers Supply, Sarah Hornsby /AgriCropCon, Leon Lucas/Grades Crop Care, Gene McAvoy/Hendry County Extension, Alice McGhee/Thomas Produce, Chuck Obern/C+B Farm, Dr. Pam Roberts/SWFREC, Wes Roan/6 L’s, Jay Shively/F+F Farm, Dr. Phil Stansly/SWFREC, Don Tanner/Country Boy, Dr. Tom Kucharek/UF/IFAS and Dr. Charlie Vavrina/SWFREC.
The SW Florida Pest and Disease Hotline is compiled by Gene McAvoy and is issued on a biweekly basis by the Hendry County Cooperative Extension Office as a service to the vegetable industry.

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