

AG NOTES
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WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS?



I had a call and specimens of some foliage from some Italian cypress trees. These trees are about ten years old and about fifteen feet tall, maybe taller. They are a privacy screen and they have done well.

These trees had some dead sections on them. Mostly not very large sections, but brown and dead none the less. There was dead foliage collected in clumps inside the network of branches.

There were several of these plants, and they were collectively pretty expensive. A lot of concern on the part of the owner, obviously.

I sent photos to the lab, and the diagnostician asked if we could collect samples and send them in for a close look and testing. We did, and it was a good thing.

The lab pathologist found spruce spider mites in large numbers. These tiny things can cause a large plant to die over time by feeding constantly and raising new generations to continue the feast. And to top it off, there was a case of secondary fungal infection going on with the feeding insects.

The good news is that the mites can be treated with a really good insecticide called bifenthrin. There are several brand-named products, fairly inexpensive, and these treatments can be sprayed on and inside the trees. Treatments will need to be repeated, and the trees will need to be monitored for the future.

The fungal infections will need to be treated with a fungicide chlorothaliniol, and it comes in many common brand forms. This will have to be monitored and applied from time to time, but the good news is there are treatments in this case, and the plants won't have to be removed.

AND THIS?

I had an email from some folks who had the same sort of problem with a blue spruce that they had planted some time back. It had dead branches, didn't look good at all. And there were other plants in the area that had the same symptoms.

I sent the photos that they sent me to the lab and the same request came back to send specimen samples in as well. We did, and the report came back with disease and management issues.

The blue spruce likes cold weather, that's why you find them in the mountains and mostly out west. No diseases were detected after checking for pathogens. This one had 'abiotic stress' and treatment was watering during heat and drought. It's not the first time I've seen this, and I don't recommend them usually, but there's nothing wrong with trying.

The pine sample had a fungal canker *Botryosphaeria*, which usually shows up in plants that have stress from another cause. Pruning dead tissue back to live tissue was recommended, sanitizing pruning shears between cuts with a 10% bleach solution. This is a good standard procedure to prevent spreading disease to other plants or other parts of a plant. Again, it was suffering from heat and dry conditions.

There was a pine webworm on the sample, and this may also be the cause of the stress. Treating with an insecticide labeled for such was recommended.

WHAT'S THE MARKET?

Drs. Andrew Griffith and Aaron Smith, livestock and crop economists with UT Extension, shared these comments. (I may make some of my own.)

Fed cattle traded \$2 higher compared to last week on a live basis. Prices on a live basis were primarily \$105 to \$107 while dressed prices were mainly \$163 to \$167. The 5-area weighted average prices through Thursday were \$106.35 live, up \$2.19 compared to last week and \$165.30 dressed, up \$5.60 from a week ago. A year ago, prices were \$114.16 live and \$181.41 dressed. (See the difference in prices over a year apart? Cattle are much cheaper, about \$150 a head on a finished animal.)

Based on Tennessee weekly auction market price averages, steer prices were \$3 to \$6 higher compared to last week while heifer prices were \$4 to \$8 higher compared to a week ago. (Sounds great?) The gain in calf and feeder cattle prices this week offset the losses from the prior week, which still means cattle prices are low. (Sounded good, but the market is not good.)

Corn, soybeans, and wheat were up. The current market rally has presented profitable pricing opportunities for corn and soybean producers during this year's harvest and for crop to be held in storage into the winter and spring. This was a very welcome development in an extremely challenging marketing year.

For the week, January 2021 soybean futures traded between \$10.45 and \$11.12. March 2021 soybean futures closed at \$10.99, up 51 cents since last Friday. November 2021 soybean futures closed at \$10.06, up 35 cents since last Friday.

For the week, December 2020 corn futures traded between \$3.93 and \$4.17. March 2021 corn futures closed at \$4.13, up 10 cents since last Friday. December 2021 corn futures closed at \$3.95, down 8 cents since last Friday.

December 2020 wheat futures closed at \$6.02, up 4 cents since last Friday. December 2020 wheat futures traded between \$5.91 and \$6.26 this week. March 2021 wheat futures closed at \$6.09, up 9 cents since last Friday. In Tennessee, new crop wheat cash contracts ranged from \$5.86 to \$6.17. July 2021 wheat futures closed at \$6.05, up 13 cents since last Friday.

(Good news for crop farmers. Prices are up and could remain that way for a time. On the other hand, these grains are used in livestock feeds, and that will add to the troubles for animal feeders with higher feed prices. The extra beef in the coolers from heavier cattle, more cattle on feed to add to that problem, putting pressure on calf prices, makes for a tough cattle business. We are second in the state for cattle numbers, and we have nearly 900 farms with beef cattle. It affects a lot of our farmers' incomes in a huge way.)