

More than drought affecting wheat yields

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U.S. agronomists say wheat producers have more than a drought affecting their yields this year, as various viruses invade crops.

Texas Agricultural Experiment Station researcher Tom Allen, a plant disease diagnostician, said he saw more than 150 wheat samples sent to the Great Plains Diagnostic Network lab this growing season, in addition to 400-plus samples the plant pathology staff gathered across the Panhandle.

Ninety-five percent of the samples were diagnosed with the wheat streak mosaic virus. The virus is vectored by the wheat curl mite, Allen said, and so far there's no treatment for either the virus or the mite.

The samples came from as far north as Nebraska and as far south as Dallas, said plant pathologist Charlie Rush, making the outbreak the most widespread in years for wheat streak mosaic damage.

"We don't have a good understanding of the wheat curl mite and its ecology," Rush said. "There are big gaps in our knowledge. But we ... have things working in the field that should provide answers in the next couple of years."

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