

Pasture Mealy Bug



Mealy Bug damage

Pasture mealy bug (*Balanococcus poae*)

Introduction

Pasture mealy bug (PMB) can be a serious pasture pest that is found primarily in Canterbury as well as in the Manawatu and Nelson regions. PMB is a small insect found around and in the crown, as well as on the upper roots of a range of pasture grasses, where it sucks the sap from the plant's tissues.

Identification

Adult mealy bugs are small and pink in colour, and can grow to 5mm in size. They are egg shaped with no easily discernible head or legs (resembling a shriveled pea). The adult stage becomes sedentary and surrounds itself with a white wax secretion once they become established on host grasses. This white waxy secretion that can appear as cotton-wool-like globules in the plant crown and upper roots, is probably the easiest means by which to identify this pest.

Damage

The damage done to pasture by PMB can often resemble drought stress that is the general browning off of pasture. PMB damage tends to affect a whole paddock, rather than isolated patches. PMB damage causes widespread ryegrass death, leading to poor pasture persistence. This damage may first become apparent in January, but is usually most severe in autumn and early winter.

Prevention & management

Outbreaks of PMB are common in nil-endophyte ryegrass pastures in Canterbury. However, it has been found that AR1 endophyte protects pastures from PMB as well as standard endophyte.