

## Clover flea (*Sminthurus viridis*)

### Introduction

Clover flea (CF) is present throughout NZ and is a particular threat to white clover and lucerne. Severe damage has been reported in parts of Northland, South Auckland, Waikato and the Bay of Plenty.

### Identification

CF, also known as the lucerne flea, can easily be seen with the naked eye. It grows up to 3 mm long, and is greenish-yellow with irregular dark patches.

Adult females lay very small cream coloured eggs loose on the soil surface. The eggs hatch into small nymphs which resemble adults, and develop through 5-7 stages to adulthood.

Clover damage appears as leaf flecking, giving a measles-like effect. Under severe attack leaves appear white, as all green tissue is removed from the leaf leaving a transparent skeleton.

The fouling of the clover by the fleas tends to reduce palatability to livestock.



*Clover flea damage pattern showing on the green tissue of a clover leaf.*

### Prevention and management

CF can be successfully controlled using insecticides, by combining a low rate of insecticide to kill adults and an insect growth regulator to eliminate juveniles once they hatch from eggs.

Some white clover varieties, notably *Grasslands Prestige*, have been selected for improved tolerance.