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HAMMERING ON DRIFT

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Herbicide drift is an increasing problem and has the potential to give agriculture an environmental black eye. There are still too many cases of booms running six feet off the ground- blowing fog or drift cases where desirable plants were 20 MPH downwind. Farming pressures and acreages are at an all time high and we always preach that spray timing is critical. What can you do when wind blows morning, noon and night for weeks at a time?

The most important drift-control tool is discipline. Roundup plus corn plus wind; 2,4-D plus cotton plus wind; and many other combinations must be avoided even if you really need to spray and even if you have the latest in low-drift technology.

Drift control technology is straight forward. It includes 1) Low-drift tips (there are many kinds to choose from and they all work great; 2) Lower spray pressure (we run LESS THAN 30 PSI); 3) Keeping spray booms low (most booms only need to be 18" above the target- as long as the boom doesn't sway excessively) and 4) a drift control agent from a reputable source.

What about the older, contact-type herbicides? Labels from these products often specify 40 psi or more and higher water volumes for the sake of good coverage. One item to consider is that a number of recent studies with contact herbicides, low-drift nozzle tips and 5gpa volumes have found no problems. But, if you must improve coverage, consider a higher water volume with bigger tips (without increasing the pressure). Hauling water may be inconvenient, but it is better than buying the neighbors crop.

While high-winds are bad- zero wind on a humid, foggy morning can result in some of the worst drift. Most Ag-pilots refuse to spray herbicides early in the morning or late in the evening. A LIGHT breeze is preferable.

Last month we were personally faced with the classic situation: Our corn was planted and it needed it's preemergence treatments. Winds were 20 to 25 MPH and rain was on the way. We went out with our low-drift set up and kept our booms around 18" off the ground. This month, the weeds are dead only in our miniature test plots and not down wind. However the key factor in our success was that we also knew that there were no sensitive crops, gardens, greenhouses, homes, shrubs or prize rose bushes anywhere near our application. Before you consider spraying in a high-stress situation, remember that a drift incident will only make things worse.