

All Crops, July 31, 2002

BE FLEXIBLE FOR BURNDOWN

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So far, the biggest "weed issue" for 2002 in Southeast Missouri has been herbicide drift. Economic times and wet weather led to widespread use of stale seedbed techniques and burndown herbicides. Several herbicides have drifted, but Roundup and all of its imitators are especially damaging to corn.

Nothing needs to be burnt down right now, but it is a good time to think about how we might do better next year. The primary message in this article, is that there is flexibility in burndown timing and flexibility in chemistry. If the wind is blowing, your burndown can usually wait. If you are growing Roundup Ready, cotton or beans, you have many burndown choices.

We often say that two weeks ahead of planting is an ideal burndown target. However, "Target" is the magic word. It's not so much that two weeks is THE BEST time, but instead, it's that two weeks has great flexibility. When mother nature changes our target to 5 days before planting or 25 days before planting, burndown results are still acceptable. While we have generally discouraged the use of very early applications (four or more weeks before planting) of preemergence herbicides, perhaps they would be better than drifting onto an emerged crop.

If you are growing Roundup Ready crops, you have the additional clean up power after the crop is planted. Your actual, burndown of existing vegetation needs to be done before the crop is planted. However, Roundup Ready gives you the flexibility of using weaker chemistry for burndown and then cleaning up most leftovers later on. If worse comes to worse, burn down after planting or emergence. That's not good, but it's better than nailing the neighbors.

Gramoxone works well with a number of preemergence herbicides, including Aatrex, Cotoran, Sencor, and many others. The tank mix herbicide is important. Gramoxone by itself will only burn back bigger weeds and then they resprout. Aatrex, Cotoran and Sencor make a big difference by slowing Gramoxone down and by killing weeds from the inside out; while Gramoxone's activity is more outside-only. Just like glyphosate, Gramoxone should not be used in windy or dead-calm-inversion conditions. All crops are sensitive and it takes very little Gramoxone drift to cause visual damage. However, Gramoxone damage tends to be more superficial than damage from glyphosate.

Finally, don't be shy about calling the airplane. Don't call the airplane because you HAVE to spray, but instead call the airplane because things are wet and the wind is right. Again, flexibility is king. Our pilots are some of the best. They know that an airplane has a significant drift potential, so they are keenly aware of conditions and know how to avoid drift. Be sure to give those guys the leeway to spray properly. Again, the key to the airplane is that if the wind is right for spraying, but the soil isn't- an airplane can get the job done.