

Cotton, August 22, 2002

PLAYING WITH PALMER

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The weeds and the weatherman both pointed to Monday as having perfectly-sized Palmer amaranth and great spray weather. As usual, the weeds gave us a little bit more growth and the weatherman gave us a lot more rain. Fortunately we managed to sneak in between showers on Wednesday and Thursday- by which time we had 6 and 7" Palmer amaranth covering our cotton.

The results from earlier treatments were clear. In our preemergence test, everything had controlled a lot of Palmer. But you didn't have to look to find the escapes and they were still too thick. This year, like last, good ole Prowl + Cotoran looked as good as anything. Since Roundup cotton has been available, it's been popular to try weaker preemergence programs. However, I'm not sure it's wise to go half-way with a PRE program. If you still have to spray Roundup at the exact same time- PRE or not- there isn't much benefit. And what we saw was that our PRE treatments didn't affect how fast the weeds came up- they affected how many. Bottom line- I tend to favor an all-or-nothing approach to the use of preemergence herbicides.

There is still a lot of debate on the need for preemergence herbicides. With research-grade weed pressure, we consistently see benefits in a Roundup Ready program, but most growers do not use them. However, the best way to tell would be field history- if you are doing ok with Roundup alone, the PRE herbicide is obviously not a benefit. If things tend to get away from you, you may see a benefit. A favorite rule is to evaluate your ability to get everything sprayed on time- if that's a problem, there's likely a benefit to a PRE.

A traditional post-directed, RESIDUAL treatment needs to be part of the program. This is another place where everyone is trying to get into the field with Roundup. Our best programs include a mainstream, traditional residual broadleaf herbicide (Caparol, Cotoran, or Direx/Diuron). Those herbicides do most of the work. If you are adding Aim, or Harvade, be sure you need it. The residual herbicide is the meat of the program and Aim/Harvade only serve as icing. This year we took a look at Roundup versus MSMA as the "grass partner" and the MSMA tended to look better.

We continue to test Valor here and there and find it to be a good post-directed herbicide. However, we always find a few escaped Palmer pigweed and morningglory where we've sprayed Valor. Our currently available post directed herbicides perform similarly.

The benefits of cotyledon-stage treatments were very evident this year. In a perfect year, cotyledon-stage treatments may not be needed. However, you might think of them as the replacement for preemergence herbicides- an insurance policy to give the program some timing flexibility.