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## **YIELD LAG LIVES**

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Yields of the new Clearfield rice varieties were a hot topic at a recent meeting. Yields were often good, but not always. A few growers discovered that they tend to yield 20 or 30 bushels less than the hottest new varieties under conditions with no red rice. It was sad to hear that folks were dissatisfied. Both extension and the companies had a strong educational program about the varieties.

Our memories are too short: the first Roundup Beans, Roundup Cotton and BXN cotton often had disappointing yields. In many cases, this delayed growers from using these technologies where they were needed.

A recurring theme is that if the technology is positioned for problem fields and growers are aware of yield lag, the growers will be satisfied with what they get. The yield potential of an infested field can be maximized by herbicide-tolerant varieties- even when those varieties have less-than-optimal genetic potential.

In this case, I thought things were done right. The first Clearfield varieties, averaged 20 to 30 bushels off of the top rice lines. The sales folks stressed that a red rice situation would be where the varieties would shine. Even though they fell a bit short in optimally-managed variety trials.

Don't get the wrong idea about yield lag. There is nothing wrong yield-wise with herbicide tolerance. The problem is when you first put tolerance into a variety- you're sidelined for a few years working on the tolerance. In the meantime, all of the other 30 traditional lines continue to creep forward in yield. The first few herbicide tolerant lines just can't top the army of good stuff that's already there.

With Roundup beans, Roundup cotton and BXN cotton the problem has run its course. The more time that passes, the more breeders are able to move the herbicide tolerant lines to be neck and neck with the conventional. With Roundup Corn (in the Mid South), Clearfield rice and the upcoming Liberty Link cotton, we are going to have to repeat the yield lag process.

Same as before- the new herbicide tolerant lines offer much-needed weed control. But in their first few years, you should not grow them without a compelling weed problem. With a red rice problem, the added yield potential of the weed control outweighs the loss of genetic yield potential. Grow a herbicide tolerant variety for the purpose of weed control, but always know the genetic yield potential and be aware of your trade offs.