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FALL HERBICIDE APPLICATIONS FOR NEXT YEAR'S CROPS

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Roughly 10 years ago, Midwestern weed scientists were debating the benefits of applying residual herbicides in the fall. The herbicides are supposed to provide "burndown" weed control for crops planted the next spring. The concept is great- spray a residual herbicide in the fall when you have a little more time, and then you can skip your spring burndown during the planting crunch. The weed control would also speed warming and drying in the spring, reduce weed-related insect problems, and control some difficult weeds. An important counter argument was that weedless soil would be more prone to erosion.

However, the key question was whether the herbicide would last until planting time. If it didn't and you wound up doing a full burndown anyway, then your fall application mostly made your pocketbook thinner and the chemical companies' pocket book fatter.

For a fall herbicide program to be worthwhile, it needs to significantly displace the use of a spring burndown, or control a weed that wouldn't be controlled otherwise. It doesn't have to totally eliminate a spring burndown, but, you don't need to be paying for two full-price treatments when we know that a normal burndown will work..

In the Mid-South, we didn't hear much about this concept until last year. Some of it was bleed-over of Midwest advertising. But, some of it was spurred by glyphosate resistance problems in horseweed (marestail). The commercials were everywhere and some growers gave it a try. We followed suit with a series of studies on corn, cotton and soybeans. The key variable in our study was that each fall treatment was sprayed on two sets of plots. In one set, we had no follow up treatment, and the other plot received a traditional spring burndown.

Here's the results: In every case, the fall herbicide treatment needed a significant springtime burndown application. Fall-applied Princep almost made it to corn planting time, but not quite. Actually, the cotton and soybean herbicides also lasted until about a month before corn planting time too- but that's way too soon to be beneficial for their target crops.

Based on our research, we do not recommend the use of fall-applied herbicides, unless a grower has a very special situation. However, we did some other research using these very same herbicides in tank mixtures with burndown herbicides- and applying them at a normal burndown time. You must choose your tank mixes carefully to avoid antagonism, and watch for preplant restrictions; but, these programs worked extremely well. When the residual herbicide is applied close to planting, it not only supplements the burndown herbicide, it also benefits in-crop weed control.

More important than a fall herbicide, is a special, early application of a 2,4-D or Clarity-type herbicide in March. Weeds like cutleaf eveningprimrose, and glyphosate resistant marestail are

controlled with this application. In most cases, a general burndown, roughly 2 to 3 weeks before planting is still needed. But, forgetting to make these March treatments is our number one no-till problem in Southeast Missouri.

If you've been thinking about trying fall herbicides, remember that the key is that it must save you some time and money in the springtime, or control a particular weed you can't control otherwise. Also, think about saving that fall herbicide until springtime, when it can give residual weed control to your crop. Finally, don't forget that the bigger issue is a special burndown treatment in March.