

News Column

by Greg McClure, KSU-Riley County Extension Agriculture Agent
110 Courthouse Plaza
Manhattan, KS 66502

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Phone: 785/537-6350
Fax: 785/537-6353

DICAMBA TRAINING

It was in all the farm publications last summer. It dominated coffee shop conversations among farmers. It surely made a few attorney's some extra money. And it even increased the call volume to your local county extension agent.

What am I talking about? Dicamba drift. If your soybeans weren't one of the dicamba tolerant varieties, there is a good chance they were affected by off-target movement of dicamba in the summer of 2017.

For the casual reader who doesn't pay full attention to the farming world, dicamba is a herbicide, first introduced to the market in 1962, that is often used to kill broadleaf weeds while not adversely affecting grass-type plants. Banvel was the most common trade name for many years, but now there are several dicamba products.

We have always been cautious applying dicamba because of its' tendency to volatalize and move off-target, especially mid-summer when temperatures are higher. For that reason, it hasn't always been the first choice for many producers, even though it often offered better weed control than 2,4-D.

Two years ago, in 2016, dicamba resistant soybeans hit the market, but the specific formulations of dicamba approved for use on those soybeans weren't available until after the 2016 growing season. In some cases – mostly in other states – farmers used other formulations of dicamba (off-label and illegally), resulting in drift issues and damage to non-target crops.

For the 2017 growing season we had both pieces of the puzzle available to our growers, dicamba resistant soybeans and the proper formulations of dicamba. The new dicamba formulations were touted as having less volatility, and would be less likely to move off-target.

Yet we still had problems.

Weed control using dicamba on dicamba resistant soybean varieties was good. I think producers were satisfied with how clean their fields were. Unfortunately, off-target damage was far too common. Damage to conventional soybean varieties – those without the dicamba resistance trait – ranged from mild leaf cupping to severe stunting.

Some would call last year's drift issues a problem. Others would call it a disaster. Depending on the situation, I wouldn't argue with either assessment.

A lot was learned about dicamba in 2017. I think we all learned that volatilization and drift can occur a lot longer after application than we ever expected. We learned weather is big factor, and we can have both too much and too little wind. And I certainly hope we learned that we darn well better pay attention to what our neighbor has planted beside us before spray our fields with dicamba.

Because of the off-target issues with dicamba in 2017, the new formulations of dicamba – Engenia, FeXapan, and XtendiMax – are now classified as Restricted Use pesticides. To purchase these herbicides, applicators must have either a private applicator license or a 1A (Agriculture Plant) commercial applicator license. To apply them, the applicator must have attended one of the special dicamba training meetings.

Dicamba applicator training will be offered at the February 22 Coffee Shop Agronomy meeting, scheduled for 10:30 a.m. to noon at Nelson's Landing in Leonardville. Dallas Peterson, K-State Research and Extension weed scientist, will present the program.

We expect a higher number of participants at this coffee shop meeting because of the dicamba training. For that reason, it is important to have all participants registered in advance. You can register online at www.riley.ksu.edu.

If you have questions, you can reach me at the Riley County Extension Office at 785/537-6350. Or, you can send e-mail to gmcclure@ksu.edu.

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