

News Column

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SOYBEANS OR SUMMER FOOL?

I photographed a couple of fields last summer that I think were planted to soybeans, but they were so weedy that they looked like the “summer fool” fields Dad showed me when I was a kid. Yep. That’s what he called it – summer fool.

I grew up in what folks around here call western Kansas, in a part of the state where summer fallow was a common practice. Our family employed a wheat-milo-fallow rotation, harvesting two crops in three years. However, there were still several neighbors whose cropping system was wheat-fallow-wheat, harvesting a crop every other year.

In a wheat-fallow system there is about 14 ½ months from wheat harvest until the next wheat crop is planted. That 14 ½ months is the fallow period and the idea is to keep the land weed free to conserve moisture. Although the fallow period spanned from one summer to the next fall, the primary growing season – when water use is at its peak – is in the summer, thus the term summer fallow.

A couple of our neighbors had the habit of leaving their fallow ground untouched from harvest in late June or early July until the following June or July,... a whole year. By then, the weeds were tractor high and the moisture the farmers were trying to conserve had been consumed by the weeds. And that’s why Dad called it summer fool – they were fooling themselves when they called it summer fallow.

Summer fallow is rare in this part of the state and really only happens in years when it is

too wet for too long and farmers can't get their spring crops planted. Tall weeds though, like my neighbors used to grow on their "summer fool" acres, have become far too common.

Glyphosate resistance can be blamed for many of the weed control challenges we experienced in 2015. Yet, glyphosate shouldn't have to take all the blame. Most of those weeds could have been controlled earlier in the season with a different product, instead of relying on glyphosate to do all the work.

Growth regulator herbicides like 2, 4-D and dicamba are inexpensive and effective for controlling rosette marestail in the spring prior to soybean planting. Dicamba works a little better than 2,4-D, and provides some residual control at higher use rates. The key is to apply either herbicide, or a combination of the two to small marestail seedlings or rosettes, before the marestail bolts.

The closer you get to soybean planting time, the harder it will be to control marestail plants because they will have bolted and will be considerably larger. Dallas Peterson and Doug Shoup, K-State Extension specialists, recommend tank mixes of glyphosate with FirstRate, Classic, Sharpen, Optill, or 2,4-D to burn down and control larger marestail plants.

Peterson and Shoup caution producers to carefully read and follow product labels. The plant-back restriction ahead of soybeans can range from 7 to 30 days, depending on rate and the product applied.

Marestail isn't the only glyphosate resistant weed specie to cause problems in soybeans last summer. Glyphosate resistant pigweed – primarily Palmer amaranth and common waterhemp – was a huge problem in some fields. As is the case with marestail, one of the keys to good control is to attack the plants when they are small, either before planting or when they are just emerging.

Because the topic is a little bigger than what I can cover in this space, we will talk about soybean weed control at the next coffee shop agronomy meeting.

Soybean Weed Management – February 25

The discussion topic for the final meeting in this year's Coffee Shop Agonomy series is soybean weed management. The meeting will be held at 10:30 a.m. on Thursday, February 25 at Nelson's Landing in Leonardville. Curtis Thompson, K-State Research and Extension Weed Scientist, will be the featured speaker.

Thompson will discuss herbicide options and timing, as well as the option to use Liberty Link soybeans and Liberty herbicide as an alternative to glyphosate. Register online at www.riley.ksu.edu, or call the Extension Office by noon the day before to let us know you plan to attend.

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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