

Preplant burndown beefs up yields

By ERIC McMULLIN

A GOOD preplant burndown is critical to getting field crops planted on time, and timely planting is critical to good yields.

"Field trials have shown that for every day after April 15, cotton growers lose approximately 1% to 2% of yield, assuming that weather conditions that

Key Points

- Crop yields are especially sensitive to on-time planting.
- Stinging nettle is a new weed problem, mainly near dairies.
- ET and Roundup mix is promising for controlling stinging nettle.

year had provided opportunities to plant," reports Steve Wright, farm adviser for Tulare and Kings counties.

Corn yields, too, are especially sensitive to on-time planting, as the plants need time to develop the full canopies needed to take in sunlight during the long summer days of June and July.

In vegetables, timely planting is important not so much because of the

weather, but so harvest will occur when contracts call for delivery.

Jump on planting

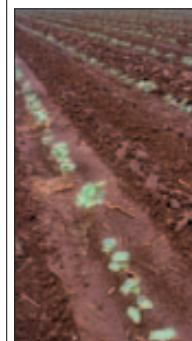
"Timely planting is always something we encourage," says Wright. "It is critical to be ready to jump on planting when those ideal planting windows occur during March and April."

And in order to do so, fields must be clean of weeds, Wright notes.

"Maintaining clean beds sets up a crop for a successful early start and a uniform stand," explains Wright.

In some cases, tillage takes care of weeds prior to planting. But tillage is becoming less and less popular. In those cases, herbicides are used.

The king of preplant herbicides is Roundup, although Gramoxone, Rely and 2,4-D are also used. Roundup is popular because it has a broad spectrum of control, it's inexpensive, and it has few handling restrictions. However, Roundup is starting to show some cracks in its armor.



GOOD START: Maintaining clean beds sets up a crop for a successful early start. Field trials indicate that for every day cotton is planted after April 15, growers lose approximately 1% to 2% of yield.

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New dairy weed

University of California Cooperative Extension has found glyphosate-resistant marestail in the San Joaquin Valley, "and we suspect hairy fleabane may be developing resistance," reports Kurt Hembree, UCCE farm adviser, Fresno.

"Stinging nettle is really becoming a problem, especially near dairies," reports Dan Buchak, a pest control adviser with Gillespie Ag Service in Porterville. "Fields near dairies get a lot of manure put on them, and most of those fields have wheat on them in the winter and get double-cropped into corn in the spring."

He has used Goal in the past to control stinging nettle, but now plans to use ET. "I used ET and Roundup in January of '08 on a 20-acre block that was infested with nettle. I applied 2 ounces of ET and 32 ounces of Roundup, plus Crop Oil Concentrate and ammonium sulfate, and it worked great."

ET is a broadleaf herbicide from Nichino America. It has no preplant restrictions in corn, wheat, soybeans and cotton, and a new label that requires just a two-day preplant interval in specialty crops.

One additional factor is drift, says Buchak. "Drift control is very important to me. I always include 38 F Drift at a rate of 3 ounces per 100 gallons in just about everything I spray. ET will help there, too, because it isn't as volatile as some of these other herbicides."

McMullin is a Berkeley writer.