

CAROLINA-VIRGINIA

FARMER

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Sensitive residues

By RICHARD DAVIS

ANALYSTS say if the United States is going to increase tobacco sales in the future, the increase will come from the export market. To expand those sales, however, U.S. farmers need to be sensitive to European concerns over tobacco residues, particularly from MH-30, or maleic hydrazide, and endosulfan.

This was the message North Carolina Agriculture Commissioner Steve Troxler imparted to growers and other tobacco industry businesspeople at a meeting he called for June 22 in Raleigh.

The commissioner led a trade mission to Denmark and the United Kingdom during the first week of June. His goal was to convince industry people in those countries to buy more North Carolina agricultural products, including fruits, vegetables and tobacco.

Loren Fisher, North Carolina State University tobacco specialist and assistant professor of crop science, points out how Troxler emphasized the positive at the meeting.

"We sell a great deal of tobacco in Europe now, and it is really good quality tobacco," Fisher notes. "There is a possibility we could sell more if we monitored our residues more closely. One point the commissioner emphasized is that

Key Points

- United States seeks to increase world-market share of tobacco.
- Growers need to be sensitive to concerns over residues.
- U.S. residue levels are relatively low now, but lower is better.

there is nothing wrong with the tobacco we're producing now. That is a very important point. Still, residues are an issue, particularly MH residues, and have been an issue for years on U.S. tobacco. Our biggest competitors are not using MH."

Fisher notes that MH is not necessarily a health concern as such, but the fact that it leaves a very high residue and the fact that some countries in Europe are very sensitive to residue issues are factors that need to be considered. MH leaves a much higher residue than any other pesticide used on tobacco. Primarily, it is a leaf-surface residue on the cured leaf, although there is some residue within the cell tissue. A lab analysis picks up on the residue. The amount that the lab will find on a leaf varies from year to year. In a dry year, for example, the residues are typically higher.

Interestingly, MH is also widely used on onions and potatoes. Although those are food crops, they typically have residues that are similar to those

that are found on tobacco.

Endosulfan is an insecticide that also leaves high residues that can show up in the crop. It is used more commonly in burley than in flue-cured tobacco. Fisher notes that some of the labels for endosulfan allow application just prior to harvest. When growers apply it at that time, the residues may sometimes be higher.

"That is really the same thing with MH," he adds. "Growers need to be aware that even with labeled applications, they can have residues higher with MH than we like to see."

"I think we want to educate growers," says Fisher. "Growers need to understand the concerns that are out there and seize the opportunity to be the best stewards they can be with the crop. If they can do that, I think there is a lot of potential for our tobacco in Europe — probably more than we see."

The issue of increasing tobacco export markets is especially timely right now, since the price of U.S. tobacco has become cheaper in the wake of the federal quota system buyout. "There is more potential to sell tobacco overseas than there has been in a long time," Fisher says. "We just need to understand the issues that go along with exporting tobacco, and one of those big issues is pesticide residues."



TAKING ADVANTAGE OF ADVANTAGES: Grover Adkins of Enfield, N.C., says that while many peanut farmers have backed off goobers in his area of North Carolina, he's in the peanut business for the long term. Grover farms with his son, Andy, and his brother Earl. They are members of a local cooperative and are well-diversified, which gives them an edge over some other peanut producers. They also currently have enough land to rotate their peanuts, which is some protection against diseases. Read more about how Grover and Andy view the current peanut-marketing situation on Page 6.

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