

Crop Management

PowerFlex adds to weed-control arsenal

By T.J. BURNHAM and DAN CRUMMETT

DOW AgroSciences' new small-grain herbicide, PowerFlex, is now registered for most of the West.

Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Utah, Montana, Colorado and Utah currently post registrations for the ALS formula, which Oregon State University weed scientist Dan Ball says provides another tool to fight cheatgrass.

"While this product has performed well in our tests, with good crop tolerance, it is another Group 2 herbicide in cheatgrass control where we really need other modes of action," he says.

PowerFlex is in the same mode of action classification as products like Maverick and Osprey, but there are no products in alternative groups that growers could use to prevent herbicide resistance.

After testing PowerFlex for two years, Ball says it is "as good or better as competitive herbicides currently available."

But while the competition comes with longer plant-back restrictions, PowerFlex is labeled with a nine-month limit before planting most of the normal wheat rotation crops, such as peas. That's a substantial reduction from the 18-

Key Points

- Dow AgroSciences brings new tools to wheat producers.
- PowerFlex is a good tankmix partner with many products.
- The product tested well in the western region of the U.S.

month to two-year restriction on other products in the class targeting similar weed species.

Dow's new water dispersible 7.5% active ingredient granule enjoys a spring or fall application flexibility that may be of particular interest to farmers in higher rainfall areas in rotation.

While Ball reports no crop injury in his test areas (Pendleton, Ore., and Walla Walla, Wash.), he warns that producers in harsher environments such as the Palouse, where winters are tougher, could experience different results.

Group therapy

"Basically, what I've found is that PowerFlex does a good job against downy brome and ryegrass," he says.

But his abiding concern remains with the single group of products used to control weeds like downy brome. "Weed scientists are always concerned with putting all of our eggs in one



NEW TOOL: Growers walk a field near Walla Walla, Wash., checking out the effectiveness of Dow's new PowerFlex herbicide.

basket," he says.

Jim Parker, Dow's national marketing manager, says PowerFlex is coming to market in 2008 after only two years ramp-up, and should provide small-grain producers with easy-to-use single application postemergence control of many of their weed problems.

Parker says the active ingredient, pyroxulam, and the wheat safeners included in PowerFlex were evaluated in Australia, Canada and the United States before the compound was registered for use in the Pacific Northwest, as well

as other parts of the nation.

"Since we had already satisfied the questions with proprietary safeners in PowerFlex, we were able to bring it on line about three years earlier than most similar tools," he explains.

The compound requires a surfactant.

Parker says introduction of PowerFlex fills in his marketing map for the company's presence in the small-grain industry across the country. "We started with Gold Sky in the Pacific Northwest and with CleanWave up the western side of the

Wheat Belt near the Rockies," he notes. "We have Starane and WideMatch for the Red River Valley and Idaho, and now PowerFlex" for the West, as well as Central and Southern Plains and Delta region.

Pricing, promises Parker, will be competitive with other products being used.

In the *Western Farmer-Stockman's* eight-state readership, the product is currently registered for use in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Colorado and Montana. Dow is pursuing registration for Wyoming, Nevada and Utah.

Boise Valley in mint condition despite foreign competition

By RUSTY TEWS

DREW Eggers' father planted some of the first commercial mint grown in Idaho on the family's farm south of Meridian in 1968.

"The reason mint does well here," says Eggers, "is we have lots of water; mint takes 4½ acre-feet." Eggers' fields are surface-irrigated with water from the Boise River storage system.

According to the Idaho Mint Commission, Boise Valley's long growing season; hot, dry sum-

Key Points

- Mint oil acreage is down in Idaho.
- Increased demand, reduced supplies are increasing prices.
- Growers are turning to corn and alfalfa as easier crops.

mers; and deep, clay loam soils make the area a prime location for growing mint. Like the 80 other mint growers in the area and 200 statewide, Eggers produces two varieties of spear-

mint and several varieties of peppermint oils used in toothpaste, candies and pharmaceuticals worldwide.

Mint stands are planted from root stock and are productive through a five-year period. According to Eggers, the second and third years of mint rotation are usually the most productive. Mint farmers wait five to eight years before replanting fields to reduce weeds and disease. "If you are on new ground, you get your best yields. I farm on the home place and it is minted out," says Eggers.

Mint acreage decreasing

Mint acreage has fallen in recent years as competition from foreign markets has driven prices down. Other crops such as alfalfa hay and corn have replaced mint in the past decade.

Harvesting mint is similar to harvesting alfalfa hay with cut-



HOSTING TOURS: Mint oil producer Drew Eggers hosts farm tours for the Boise Convention and Visitors Bureau on his Meridian, Idaho, farm. "Please brush your teeth twice, instead of once, and chew more gum."

ting, curing and chopping, but differs as the chopped mint is blown into enclosed trailers, which are taken to steam boiler plants where steam is injected throughout the bottom of the trailer. Mint oil is caught in the escaping steam and distilled into pure oil and distilled water.

Eggers reports 1 acre of mint yields 100 pounds of oil. As recent as 2006, this oil brought \$7 a pound. Many growers have contracted this year's production at \$18. Eggers also reports that in May the open market price had risen to \$25.

Statewide, Idaho mint acreage continues to decrease. Roger Batt, executive director

of the Idaho Mint Growers Association, reports that competitive crops such as corn and wheat are easier to grow. Demand for the fragrant oil, however, has grown worldwide resulting in higher prices.

Batt says, "It is anticipated that in Idaho for 2008, the mint crop will decrease by 15% due to competitive crops holding a good price in those markets."

"It is a good thing that commodity prices are higher than average to offset fuel and fertilizer and other input costs," he adds.

Tews writes from Shoshone, Idaho. He can be contacted at tewsranh2s@yahoo.com.

He said it

"The U.S. mint market is consistent year in and year out, and it is very good oil. Mint is risky to grow and takes a lot of fuel and fertilizer. India and China are our biggest competitors as they send oil to the U.S. at less than U.S. producers can deliver."



Del Christiansen,
Labbemint (a northwest mint oil blender)
representative, Nampa, Idaho