

WEED CONTROL IN ALFALFA

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Clean alfalfa fields are a must if hay is to be a profitable crop. Not only will weed-free hay bring a higher price, but clean fields will not just happen, nor can they be achieved by hit and miss weed control chemical applications. They can be achieved and maintained by well planned and carried out weed control programs.

The first step in such a program is good land preparation. Get rid of as many weeds as possible before planting. After the land has been prepared and borders made, irrigate to germinate the weeds. Then work as lightly as possible to destroy the weeds and prepare an adequate seed bed. I usually do not recommend the use of a preplant or preemergent herbicide. Weeds that would necessitate the use of a preplant herbicide can usually be controlled by the time of planting so that they will not present a problem. Seldom have I been able to obtain satisfactory weed control with a planting time herbicide. Since I will need to treat for weeds on a post emergent basis, I feel that a planting time treatment is not economical. Remember, I am talking about fall planted alfalfa in the Imperial Valley when I make these statements.

For postemergence treatments on seedling alfalfa, I use two chemicals. For winter annual grass and volunteer grains Chem Hoe 15G, IPC has given satisfactory control. Alfalfa is usually watered about the time it produces it's first or second trifoliolate stage. When grasses are a problem the IPC is applied at this time. It should be applied as close to the time of watering as feasible. I generally apply it the afternoon before if water is coming early the following morning. If there is time it would be even better to apply it the day that the water is applied. About two or three days following this irrigation the field can be treated for broadleaved weeds if needed. However, the field needs to be carefully checked to see if there is a new germination of weeds at this time, if there is, treatment should be delayed for a couple more days so these weeds will attain adequate leaf surface to be controlled. When the time is right, the broadleaved weeds can be controlled with 2,4-D B. To do this job right takes time and lots of walking, but it pays off in a nice clean seedling alfalfa field. The necessary prerequisite to a clean hay field.

After establishing a clean stand of hay it is then necessary to maintain it. This, of course, entails much more than a good weed control program. When good irrigation and cutting management is included with a good weed control program, an alfalfa stand should produce top hay yields for at least three years.

Weed control programs in established hay stands are preventative rather than curing a problem that becomes apparent. Therefore, it is imperative to know what problems might occur and take steps to prevent the problem from occurring. Probably the most common and troublesome problem is water grass, close behind comes nutsedge and sandbur. Since these germinate at different times, you must know what the problem is if you are to be able to start treatments on time. In our area nutsedge and sandbur will begin to emerge in late February or early March so treatments must be started at this time. When one or both of these pests are present, I apply Eptam in the irrigation water after a cutting of hay is made in late February or early March. I apply 2 pounds a.i. per acre during the entire irrigation period. I make this same treatment for two cuttings in a row, skip a cutting, then treat the next two cuttings, skip and follow this program until I have applied the maximum amount of Eptam allowed for the year. This has recently been increased to 12 pounds a.i. per year.

For control of water grass I usually start treatments with 2 pounds of Eptam on the cutting taken off about the first of April. Again, I apply a treatment to two cuttings in a row, skip a cutting and then make a third treatment. On most fields this is adequate, however, if weed pressure is severe, I will make a fourth treatment. Let me emphasize the importance of making the first two treatments to two cuttings in a row. Without two treatments in a row you are wasting your money and you might as well use it to go drink beer or give it to the church, something useful or enjoyable.

When I anticipate winter weeds as a problem I use a water run treatment of Furloe CIPC. Again, this should be applied prior to the time of the weeds emergence. This usually occurs in November in our area. I think that two treatments in a row are more effective than a single treatment. So I apply 2 pounds a.i. in November following a cutting or pasturing and the second treatment at the same rate in January following cutting or grazing. Furloe will give good control of the winter annual grasses and broadleaved weeds except for sowthistle.

These herbicide treatments are not used without many field inspections and knowledge of the problems that may occur. It takes the fullest cooperation from both the grower and the fieldman to make these programs work. By working together the grower can have clean hay to sell, hopefully at a profit. Additional benefits are also derived from the fact that the fields will be much freer of weeds for the succeeding crops.

I apologize for not being with you today, but I am sure that Dr. Isom will do a good job of presenting this information. Dr. Isom is very well acquainted with the problems in Imperial Valley and can answer any questions you may have.