



A National Summit on Strategies to Manage Herbicide-Resistant Weeds

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Time To Terminate Cover Crops

DECATUR, Ill. (DTN) -- I had a patch of green to gaze upon most of the winter. A thick blanket of hairy vetch was planted as a cover crop last fall on the Howard Buffett Foundation farm south of Decatur. It grew fast this spring, providing pleasant aesthetic relief from the acres of cornstalks that are the more typical scenic backdrop of my farming region.

Now dry conditions and a rapid spring are motivating farmers who planted cover crops to terminate earlier than normal. When I talked to Mark Freed, who farms near Lexington, Ill., last week, he had already started spraying his annual rye grass cover crop. "We're starting to worry about it robbing the soil of moisture and want to get it burned down as soon as conditions allow," Freed said.

This is the first year Freed has tried annual ryegrass. Years ago, his father used cereal rye and plowed it down as a green manure crop. So far he's been impressed with the root mass of annual ryegrass. As a cover crop, it is known for the deep rooting that helps loosen soils and creates channels into the subsoil that allows corn roots to get a foothold. He plans to no-till plant and/or use some light vertical tillage prior to planting.

Last summer, I traveled to Harrisburg, Ore., to visit Nick Bowers and Wayne Kizer, who grow and market annual ryegrass in the Midwest through their company KB Seed Solutions. Bowers agrees that it's time for growers to start spraying annual ryegrass when the weather is warm. Annual ryegrass can be a challenge to burn down if the herbicide application is applied in cool, cloudy and wet conditions.

"It's best to apply the burndown before the plants reach the joint stage," Bowers told DTN. The date annual ryegrass reaches the joint stage will depend on the date planted, the amount of fall growth and the weather during winter and early spring. Burndown is typically done when the annual ryegrass is 6 to 9 inches tall, but may be 12 to 15 inches tall, depending on the weather. The more mature the plant, the more difficult it is to kill back.

You can find a dandy primer on the best herbicide to use for the conditions you are facing at <http://bit.ly/...>

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Posted at 11:03AM CDT 04/02/12 by Pam Smith

Comments (1)

I prefer to disk it under when it 12-14 inches tall which for me will be late next week after i apply anhydrous. Then i wont have to apply any burndown til corn is about 8-12 inches high. Did this last year and had completely weed free field.

Posted by Paul Beiser at 10:40AM CDT 04/03/12

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