

Time to Inventory Your Weed Problems

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

Nobody ever wants to acknowledge that they have weed problems in their crops. But the truth of the matter is that everyone does. We try to hide them, we pretend that the weeds that are easily seen don't bother us, but deep down you feel like every single pigweed plant in your soybean field is mocking you! The Roundup Ready technology gave us about fifteen good years of weed control in our soybeans and corn. But that technology also made us lazy and sloppy.

With glyphosate resistant weeds popping up all over the place, the time has come to start developing a new plan for weed control. Sure, this year was a bit of an anomaly because of all the rain and the delayed planting that we had. Some fields were planted a month to six weeks later than were originally planned. Burn down herbicides were applied, but then the weeds came right back with all the rain. Let's be honest, marestalk was never well controlled by glyphosate. But the pigweed (amaranth) issue has come on strong the past few years and this year really put it under a spotlight!

The first step in your new plan, and the one that is so critical right now, is to start to inventory and document what weed problems you have where. It is important to document what you have and where it is as we plan the multi pronged attack for next year. Herbicides do not perform the same on all plant species. Some species of pigweeds are still well controlled by glyphosate while others are quickly developing resistance. It isn't enough to just say I've got "grass" or "weeds" in a field. We need to figure out what species of each you have.

Pigweeds are going to be the biggest challenge for identification. The amaranth family is huge. There are over a dozen species of "pigweeds" in the Great Plains. Roughly nine of these are considered regular weeds in crops and seven of those are common in eastern Kansas. So simply saying pigweed isn't even going to be enough. We do have a good bulletin on pigweed identification at the Extension Office or available online. Sometimes it's even helpful to take photos with your cell phone and collect samples of the different weeds you have in each field.

So let's start with gathering good information on each field. What crop is planted, what weeds do you have and maybe even include a rough map showing where particular weed problems are especially bad. Write down what crop is growing there this year, and what herbicides were used, including rates and adjuvants used, and when they were treated. Also include what crop was grown there last year and what herbicides were used. Remember that this includes burn down herbicides pre and post crop as well as pre-plant/pre-emerge herbicides and post emerge herbicides. We need to know what kind of rotational pressure and herbicide pressure we have been putting on these weed populations.

As we start preparing for next year's crop and weed control we can know where we need to tailor specific control options. If you are moving a soybean field to wheat this fall, that can help right there. If there is a lot of marestalk in a wheat stubble field going to soybeans or corn next year, we know we'll need to apply a burndown product this fall and next spring that is especially strong on marestalk (meaning more than just glyphosate!)

The development of glyphosate resistant weeds does not mean the end of clean fields. But it does indicate the need to use different burndown herbicides, more soil residual herbicides and in some cases even more rotation. That means we need a plan and the plan starts with knowing what you are dealing with right now!