

Reducing the Summer Fallow Workload

19 November 2010

THE summer fallow can be a very busy time for grain producers in the northern cropping region of southern Queensland and northern NSW.

However, the spraying workload can be greatly reduced by using a residual, pre-emergent herbicide in the early fallow months (October-December) to control nuisance summer weeds for up to six to twelve weeks.

MCA Goondiwindi agronomist Stuart Thorn provides independent cropping and farm management advice to irrigation and dryland producers in the Darling Downs, Western Downs and northern NSW cropping regions.

“A herbicide that provides good control of summer fallow weeds – and that doesn’t have to be reapplied after every rainfall event – really takes the pressure off growers’ summer-spraying workload.”

Mr Thorn has recommended the inclusion of the residual herbicide Flame® as one management tool in his clients’ summer-fallow spray program.

“The use of Flame has provided very good residual control of summer fallow weeds, and has proved particularly effective on the harder-to-kill grass weeds such as barnyard grass, liverseed grass, feather-top Rhodes grass and button grass.

“The alternative strategy is to use knockdown herbicides like glyphosate – but after every fall of rain that has to be reapplied, meaning several applications through the summer period. As a result, some grasses such as barnyard grass are at high risk of becoming glyphosate resistant. Using an alternative like Flame is a good thing from a herbicide-resistance point of view.

“We have found it particularly effective when put out in combination with another residual herbicide - to broaden the spectrum of weeds controlled.”

For Angus Woods – one of Mr Thorn’s clients – the key features of using Flame last summer on 700ha of fallow ground were peace of mind and a reduced workload.

Angus is farm manager of Woods Pastoral, Billa Billa, cropping mainly wheat, chickpeas, barley and sorghum on 12,000 ha of premium grain-growing land north of Goondiwindi.

Last summer – in early November 2009 – Flame was used over 700 hectares of land, which had bad areas of barnyard grass during the previous wet summer of 2008.

“It was extremely effective, compared with the paddocks where we didn’t use Flame. To only spray once in the fallow – and not to have to go back over a previous problem area for summer grass – was a real bonus. The Flame-treated area remained grass-free. Mixed with another residual to control broadleaf weeds, that one fallow spray helped to keep paddocks clean right through to planting.

“The benefits over the other untreated paddocks were obvious – it took four fallow sprays to manage the grasses in those areas.

“Getting across such a large property several times each summer is a huge workload. 700ha is a fair bit of area not to have to go over again.”

Mr Woods said barnyard grass was becoming a problem in the district.

“It gets big very quickly, and also stresses quickly, making it difficult for glyphosate to handle it.

“Getting Flame on early in the fallow, with a fall of rain to activate it, means we are controlling the grasses more effectively; there is no seed buildup in the soil; and there is no grass getting away from us or drawing down water from the following crop – which in turn means an even and easier planting.

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“It’s very wet here at the moment, with the potential for another summer of problem grasses, so we will target a few more areas with Flame to help reduce the problem.

“You need to plan where you are going to use Flame in the summer fallow, depending on which crops you intend to plant – each crop requires a minimum number of months between spraying and sowing.

Background

Crop Care recommends the residual herbicide Flame for pre-emergent control of annual summer grasses and significant broadleaf weeds during the summer fallow before planting wheat, barley and chickpeas. Flame is only registered for use in summer fallow in northern NSW and Queensland.

Flame can be applied from the end of harvest, but not less than three months prior to winter crop planting – and longer for some crops.

Best results are obtained when applied to dry soil, prior to weed germination; if there is greater than 30% weed cover, an application of glyphosate is recommended prior to Flame. With a light infestation of emerged weeds, a tank mix of Flame plus glyphosate or paraquat is recommended.

A rate range of 150-200ml/ha is recommended – with the higher rate where high weed pressure is anticipated, or increased residual control is required.

In several trials, winter crop yields were increased following the use of Flame during the summer fallow.

Flame is suitable for use on both cultivated and uncultivated fallows, and in standing crop residues. Controlling weeds before they establish leaves more nutrients and water for the following crop.

Flame® is a registered trademark of BASF



Harvesting wheat on the 12,000 hectare Billa Billa property belonging to Woods Pastoral, north of Goondiwindi. Farm manager Angus Woods believes that maintaining a clean summer fallow helps them to achieve good plant establishment and higher crop yields. “Last year, a single application of the residual herbicide Flame on 700 ha controlled important weeds – including hard-to-control barnyard grass – right through the summer fallow. To only spray once in the fallow – and not to have to go back over a previous problem area for summer grass – was a real bonus, greatly reducing our spraying workload.”



For More Information:

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41 Days after application, the residual herbicide Flame provides ongoing weed control in the foreground, compared with untreated ground in the background.

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