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Roundup®-tolerant alfalfa likely to be used in Iowa this year

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Roundup®-tolerant alfalfa likely to be used in Iowa this year

Abstract

Some Iowa alfalfa producers will likely be planting some glyphosate-tolerant alfalfa this year. Iowa producers have been asking about it. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service granted approval to Forage Genetics International and Monsanto for sale and use of Roundup Ready® (RR) alfalfa on June 14, 2005, and the following day the Environmental Protection Agency approved the labels to use Roundup® for weed control in Roundup Ready® alfalfa forage and hay production. Approvals also have been secured from individual states for use labels.

Keywords

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Crop Production

Roundup[®]-tolerant alfalfa likely to be used in Iowa this year

by Stephen K. Barnhart, Department of Agronomy

Some Iowa alfalfa producers will likely be planting some glyphosate-tolerant alfalfa this year. Iowa producers have been asking about it.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service granted approval to Forage Genetics International and Monsanto for sale and use of Roundup Ready[®] (RR) alfalfa on June 14, 2005, and the following day the Environmental Protection Agency approved the labels to use Roundup[®] for weed control in Roundup Ready[®] alfalfa forage and hay production. Approvals also have been secured from individual states for use labels.

The United States regulatory agencies granted full approval to alfalfa containing the Roundup Ready[®] trait for commerce within the United States, including approval for marketing and consumption as food, food ingredients, and feed for livestock. These products also now have the necessary import approvals in Japan, Mexico, and Canada. Regulatory approval is still pending in Korea.

Forage Genetics has simultaneously developed RR varieties adapted to most of the uniquely different alfalfa growing regions (winter dormant areas, semi-dormant areas, and non-dormant growing areas). Many seed companies have agreements with Forage Genetics to sell RR alfalfa in the Midwest this spring planting season.

The key question is the value of this trait in alfalfa to Midwest alfalfa producers. Managing weeds during seedling establishment is certainly a major selling point for the technology. In addition, the use of a broad spectrum herbicide may be attractive to some growers to aid them in maintaining weed-free stands and possibly improving forage quality and value of the hay in the marketplace.

As with other crops developed with the glyphosate-tolerant trait, there is an additional technology/management fee associated with RR alfalfa. Since alfalfa is the first perennial crop carrying this trait, the fee is understandably higher than for an annual crop. East of the Rocky Mountains, the onetime technology fee per 50-lb bag of Roundup Ready[®] alfalfa seed is \$125. That works out to be about \$30



Small square bales dropped individually in field. (Garry Lacefield)

more per acre for a grower planting 12 lb/acre. Add to this the cost of the seed itself, and these varieties are selling for about \$6 per pound. In addition, seed buyers (forage growers) must sign Technology/Stewardship Agreements and must have a valid Monsanto Technology/Stewardship Agreement (MTA).

Remember, when selecting alfalfa varieties, be sure to consider information on all the important traits you need in top performing alfalfa varieties in your situation (winter hardiness, disease, and insect resistance/tolerance, etc.).

The technology also has brought controversy. RR alfalfa in a rotation with other RR crops may contribute to the possible development of herbicide-tolerant weed populations. And, there is currently a legal dispute against the USDA for release of the RR alfalfa from growers and groups who have concerns about pollen spread and its impact on organic and alfalfa seed production.

Stephen K. Barnhart is a professor of agronomy with extension, teaching, and research responsibilities in forage production and management.