ADVANCES IN ALFALFA WEED CONTROL

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The most significant advances in weed control in alfalfa have originated from developments in herbicide technology. This method of weed control began over 20 years ago when such herbicides as EPTC and 2,4-DB were being used by alfalfa farmers. Since then, more than twelve herbicides have been added to the list of products recommended for weed control in alfalfa. (For specific recommendations, see Extension publication "Chemical Control of Weeds in Kentucky Farm Crops", AGR-6).

The most recent developments associated with the use of herbicides in alfalfa has been in the area of grass control in established stands. Within the last five years, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) approved the uses of PARAQUAT and VELPAR in pure established stands of alfalfa immediately following the cutting and removal of hay or silage. These treatments enable farmers to control such weeds as crabgrass and foxtails that are present at the time of application. PARAQUAT will not control grass or other weeds that emerge after application, whereas, VELPAR has some "residual activity" and therefore may extend the length of time for control.

EXPERIMENTAL HERBICIDES: Researchers are continuing to evaluate the potential of new herbicides for use in alfalfa. During the 1986 season ZORIAL RAPID 80 (norflurazon) and POAST (sethoxydim) were evaluated on limited acreages under Experimental Use Permits approved by EPA.

ZORIAL RAPID 80 is a preemergence herbicide which controls annual grasses such as crabgrass and foxtails. It may also have activity in certain broadleaf weeds. Limited research has shown promising results where ZORIAL RAPID 80 was applied to established pure stands of alfalfa during dormancy and before weed emergence.

POAST is a postemergence herbicide that controls a broad spectrum of grasses including crabgrass, foxtails, fall panicum and johnsongrass. The fact that POAST is a translocated herbicide enables it to control relatively large grasses compared to between cutting applications of PARAQUAT or VELPAR. Alfalfa is tolerant to POAST, therefore it has great potential for controlling problem grasses that threaten either new or established pure stands of alfalfa.

Fusilade 2000 (fluazifop-butyl), is among the list of other postemergence herbicides that have the potential to control a broad spectrum of annual and perennial grasses in pure stands of alfalfa.
Farmers may recognize that there are several herbicides that show great promise for use in alfalfa. It is important to keep in mind that the use of such products without the proper registration or labelling can result in such potential problems as illegal residue in the crop and possibly in the animals which consume the crop. Therefore, use only those products which are registered for use in alfalfa.