

PIK acres will need weed control

UNIVERSITY PARK — Farmers who participate in the government's Payment in Kind (PIK) program this season will be inclined to idle their less productive acres.

When making that decision, Nathan Hartwig, Extension weed control specialist at Penn State, says farmers can "improve their longterm profitability by diverting those areas most severely infested with problem perennial weeds.

"Several grassy weeds offer potential for reduction on diverted acres," says Dr. Hartwig. "These would include quackgrass, wirestem muhly, shattercane and johnsongrass. Broadleaf weeds that should be worked on include horsenettle, hemp dogbane, common milkweed and Canada

thistle, which is on our noxious weed list."

Control weeds

Under PIK rules, a grower must control weeds on his idled acres. The rules state: "A farm operator shall, in a timely manner, use needed control measures for erosion, insects, weeds and rodents on the conservation use acreage." Failure to do so can result in a reduction or complete loss of program benefits. What are the control options? There are really only two: mechanical or chemical.

Mechanical weed control could include clipping or tillage. Clipping does not kill weeds but can prevent them from setting seed and increasing future weed control problems. In the case of perennial weeds, clipping will not

control growth of underground rootstock.

Tillage poses a number of problems. First, it's expensive in terms of equipment, fuel and labor.

Second, it often compounds the problems by spreading the perennial's reproductive root systems and by turning up annual weed seeds so they can germinate.

Third, it enhances the opportunity for wind and water erosion, which must be controlled to comply with PIK regulations. A cover crop, which is required to protect the soil from erosion unless a farmer requests and receives ASCS permission to leave the

ground as stubble from the previous crop, will not usually provide adequate suppression of weed growth. Tillage as a means of weed control only serves to destroy the soil conservation benefits of the cover crop or stubble.

Chemical control

It should be a farmer's goal to keep expenses to a minimum on PIK-idled acres, according to the university weed control specialist. Complying with the erosion and weed control requirements of the program will incur some costs, so examine each expense carefully. While there's no return on tillage costs, an investment in chemical weed control can pay dividends for


several years to come.

By diverting acres with severe weed problems and making a small investment in the sound herbicide program, growers can bring the weeds under control so the land can be returned to maximum production in future years. And since the land is idle, farmers have maximum flexibility in both herbicide choice and application timing.

Plan program

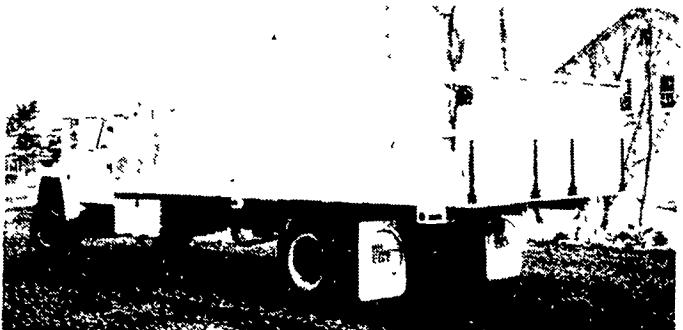
While the treatment season is still months away, a grower needs to plan now to set aside those fields, or portions of fields, with

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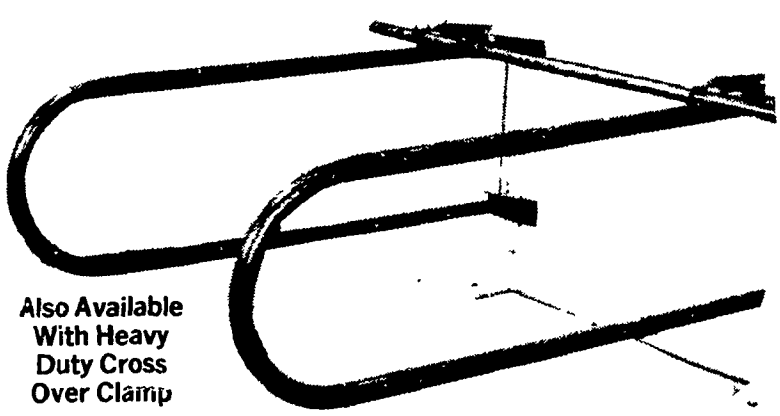
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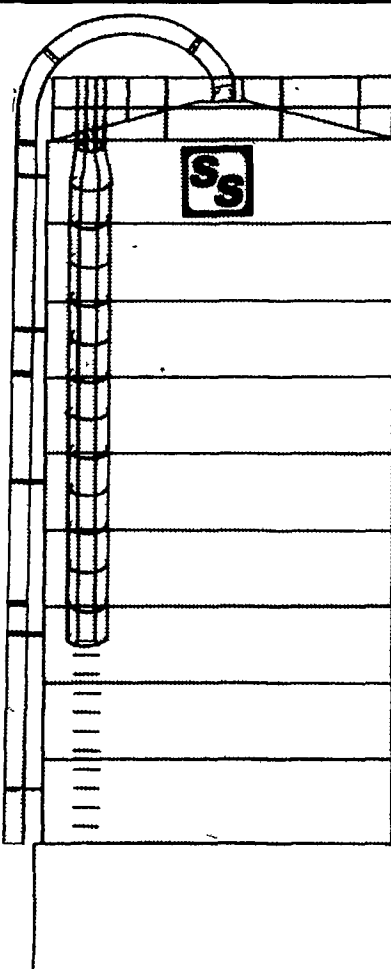
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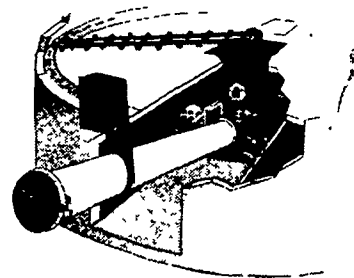
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