



Farm Talk

by
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Foxtail control measures outlined

LANCASTER — If you have been noticing more and more foxtails in your cornfields lately, your observations are understandable. A recent survey reveals that foxtails infest the greatest acreage and cause the most economic damage of any weed in corn. Partly because they are so widespread, foxtails were also rated the toughest weed to

control in corn.

The survey, conducted by Stauffer Chemical Company last winter, asked county agents from 17 corn-producing states to list the worst weed problems in their areas. The results made foxtails an easy winner in 3 out of 4 categories.

Rapid proliferation is what makes foxtails such an especially troublesome pest. A single foxtail plant can produce as many as 20 panicles, each of which may hold up to 1,000 seeds, or roughly 20,000 seeds per plant. Such large-scale reproduction makes effective weed control that much more difficult.

Moldboard plowing, now the exception instead of the rule in most of the Cornbelt, used to help keep foxtails in check. But many farmers now lean toward reduced tillage systems to control erosion and save time, fuel and equipment costs.

Replacing the moldboard plow with a chisel plow or disk may mean heavier foxtail pressure, though, because weed seeds aren't buried as deeply in the soil.

Despite greater weed pressure, however, corn producers can control foxtails in reduced tillage by using incorporated herbicides. PPI herbicides have given the most dependable control year after year, and both universities and manufacturers have found ways to adapt these products to the

reduced tillage movement.

Several years ago, for example, Sutan+ herbicide was often used in programs involving at least four tillage operations: moldboard plowing, leveling, and two incorporation passes.

Stauffer Chemical Company has now developed guidelines for thorough one-pass incorporation under reduced tillage conditions. The same recommendations apply to Sutan+ tank mixes with atrazine or Bladex, or three-way mixes of Sutan+, atrazine and Bladex.

To start, chisel plowing or disking cornstalks should sufficiently reduce the level of trash on the soil surface. Soybean stubble needs no primary tillage. Whether using a field cultivator, tandem disk or combination tool, run the apparatus at a 4 to 6 inch depth, on relatively dry soil, and at high speed — 4 to 7 mph. Rolling baskets or a good harrow should follow the tool to smooth the surface and increase horizontal distribution.

In adverse conditions, make a second incorporation pass. With heavy surface residues, impregnation on dry fertilizer or granular formulations are advised so that the herbicide can filter its way down to the soil and control foxtail where it germinates.

Weevil Eradication Foundation, are paying 70 percent of the cost. The payoffs from such an effort, if it's successful, are threefold. Reduced insecticide use, reduced production costs, and increased cotton yields. Kearney believes that once the boll weevil is eradicated, farmers in the Carolinas will begin to grow a lot more cotton. He says cotton was king before the weevil almost wiped it out and it could be again.

Kearney speculates that last fall's efforts will have eradicated most of the weevils, but some probably managed to evade the treatment. As a follow-up, bright yellow plastic traps baited with an attractant will be placed throughout both states as a means of monitoring the eradication's success. Plans call for complete eradication during the 1984 growing season.

If such an eradication program can be successful in the Carolinas, no doubt it will work in some other states. And perhaps this cotton-damaging insect will one day be just a legend remembered in an old folk song.

"The farmer say, boll weevil, what make your head so red? He say, I tell you Mr. Farmer it's a wonder I ain't dead just looking for a home, just looking for a home."

southern farmers have learned to live with the boll weevil, controlling as much as possible but never eliminating him until now. More than three-quarters of a century after his invasion, scientists are coming to grips with an eradication plan for the boll weevil. A Department of Agriculture news release states emphatically, "First year efforts to push the boll weevil out of North and South Carolina are on target." James Kearney, who carries the auspicious title of Boll Weevil Eradication Program director, says last fall's treatments went well considering a late start and unfavorable weather. He's waiting for spring trapping results to confirm the extent of the program's success.

The eradication program is aimed at ridding the Carolinas of the boll weevil completely. It's a joint effort between the Department of Agriculture, a number of state and federal agencies, and the cotton growers themselves. It involves carefully timed pesticide applications and systematic surveys to monitor the success of the effort. Farmers themselves, through the Southeastern Boll

"The boll weevil am a little black bug come from Mexico, they say. Come all the way to Texas just looking for a place to stay."

And thus began the southern farmers' struggle with an insect pest that has tormented cotton crops since the turn of the century. Perhaps no insect has attracted more legend, and I can think of only one or two others ever described in a song. But legend or not, farmers and agricultural researchers have tried all manner and means of control during the past three-quarters of a century—with little success.

"The farmer take the boll weevil, put him in the Paris Green. He say I thank you Mr. Farmer. This is so nice and clean. Then the farmer take the boll weevil, put him in the red hot sand. He say I thank you Mr. Farmer, gonna take it like a man."

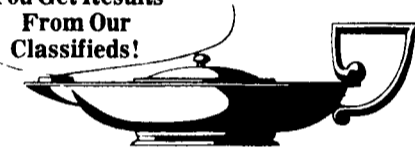
And take it he did, wiping our crops and causing economic devastation from his Texas border crossing as far north as Virginia.

"The boll weevil got half the cotton; the merchant got the rest. Didn't leave that poor old farmer's wife but one old cotton dress."

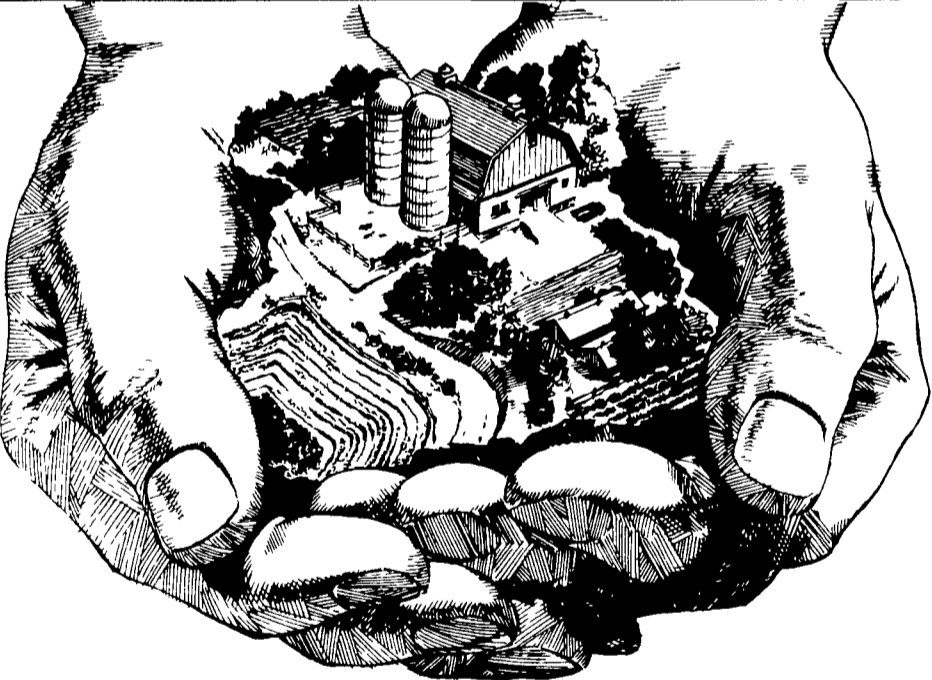
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