

EPP Gets Jump On Early-Season Weed Problems

RACINE, Wisc. — Since World War II, herbicides have been a major factor in changing the way we farm. Through the years, many were skeptical as to how adaptable herbicides would be to farming. But more so, many wondered how farmers would accept the new practices associated with herbicides.

Over the years, others in the industry said herbicides wouldn't catch on because farmers had to see the weeds first. These same people have since changed their tune and said farmers wouldn't try new chemicals because they didn't like to see weed infestations.

Times have changed. Today we have such herbicides as pre-plant incorporated (PPI), pre-emergence (Pre-e) and post-emergence over-the-top (OT). Still, as changes occur in cultural practices and the business of farming, another term has emerged — early pre-plant (EPP).

"Companies and researchers alike are looking at old reliable herbicides to see if they have new applications in early pre-plant systems," says Bruce Julian, SCS field specialist at the Conservation Tillage Information Center. "Farmers are looking at different systems in order to cut costs and to determine what is economically feasible. Companies and researchers are helping them in their quest."

Researchers and companies are looking at PPI, Pre-e and OT herbicides to determine if they have different applications in cropping practices. One of the newest and fastest growing areas is early pre-plant use in corn, sorghum and soybeans. Researchers also are studying new and different herbicide applications in winter wheat.

Early weed control
EPP offers an alternative to

farmers who are looking at early weed control when there is more rainfall prior to planting, whether it be in corn, soybeans or sorghum. "EPP may be an alternative to pre-emergence and contact herbicide use and reduced tillage in the future," Julian predicts.

What is EPP? It's the application of herbicides about 10 to 15 days before planting. The main objective of EPP is to control weeds before they emerge or just as they're beginning to emerge.

"In no-till operations, early pre-plant reduces the risk of wet weather causing weed growth to get ahead of you and provides a weed-free field in which to plant," says Dr. Alex Martin, Extension weed specialist at the University of Nebraska. "EPP herbicides take advantage of early rainfall to activate them, versus traditional pre-emergence treatment. This also reduces your risk of herbicide failure due to dry weather and

gives you more consistent weed control."

EPP advocates view lower herbicide costs as one of its main benefits. By using early pre-plant instead of a burn-down chemical in no-till operations, a farmer can save up to \$15 per acre, depending on the herbicide rate used.

"It's a fact that farmers incur higher herbicide costs because they are trying to control the weeds after they are already emerged," Martin says. "EPP gets the weeds early and you're not going to be spending the money."

EPP advantages
Some other advantages EPP treatments offer include:

- reduces the need for a contact herbicide;
- more time for rainfall to activate and improve herbicide reliability;
- reduces soil moisture and nutrient loss from early weed growth;
- provides weed-free fields to plant in;
- allows for application prior to

busy planting and spraying seasons.

Julian and others, however, caution farmers on the use of EPP. "The jury is still out on EPP use," Julian says. "It is not feasible in all situations. Researchers now have one to two years under their belts in actual field applications."

Farmers who have tried it and were successful are happy with the results, Julian says. "A lot of farmers are practicing some sort of reduced tillage. They are looking at saving a trip over the field, so substituting a herbicide for that trip may be the answer. It is less expensive than tillage."

Try test plot

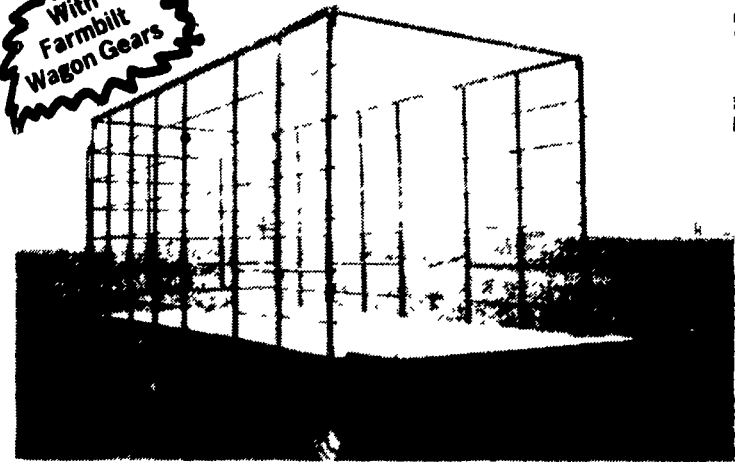
Martin advises farmers to evaluate the weed spectrum already present in fields before trying it on small test plots. Also, check the tolerance level of the crop herbicide. Plan to use herbicides that will control a broad spectrum of weeds and have sufficient residual effect to control weeds after planting. Also, the herbicide needs to have foliar

(Turn to Page C6)

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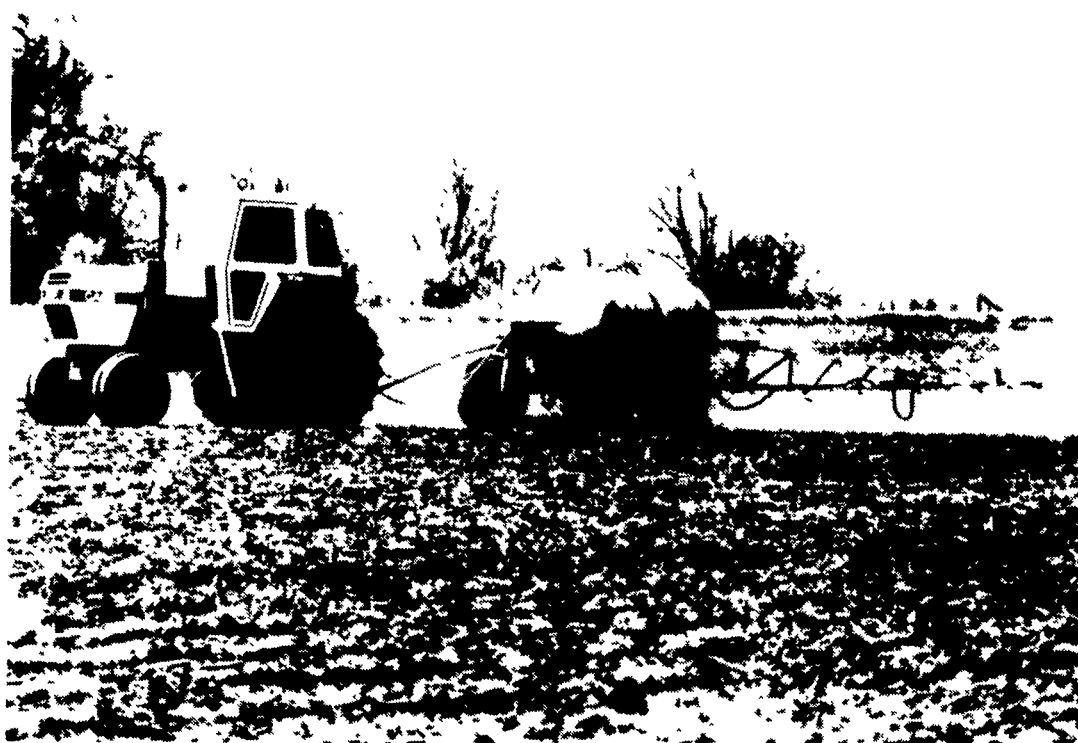
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Applying herbicides 10 to 15 days before planting allows farmers to take advantage of early spring rainfall that activates herbicides.

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