

Fungicide Newly Cleared For Alfalfa

GREENSBORO, N.C.— Establishing a healthy stand of alfalfa can be challenging. Even with good management practices such as proper fertility, variety selection, and seedbed preparation, newly planted alfalfa can still run into problems.

Soilborne pathogens such as phytophthora and pythium can attack young alfalfa plants and significantly reduce the stand and plant vigor.

University and Ciba-Geigy researchers have tested Ridomil® fungicide on alfalfa for the past eight years. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recently approved a label change that allows the product to be used on either spring- or fall-planted alfalfa.

In more than 30 trials across the United States, alfalfa treated with the fungicide had average stand increases of 25 percent. Individual increases varied by production and disease conditions. Positive results were recorded in both fall- and spring-planted alfalfa.

For disease to develop, there must be a disease triangle: 1) a susceptible host; 2) a favorable environment; and 3) disease pathogens. Pythium and phytophthora both can survive in the soil for long periods of time without a suitable host. When susceptible crops such as alfalfa are planted into infested soils and environmental conditions favor disease development, it is likely for these disease pathogens to infect the crop.

Pythium is most likely to occur when there is ample soil moisture and cool temperatures. Warm temperatures and wet soil conditions precipitate phytophthora.

University research shows that alfalfa stands and plant vigor increase when the fungicide is applied at planting. Dr. Erik Stromberg, plant pathologist at VPI & SU in Blacksburg, VA, has seen significant stand differences in greenhouse trials.

"I had a 20-percent increase in stand in greenhouse trials with the fungicide," said Stromberg. "Alfalfa was planted into soil infested with *pythium ultimum*. I had two different treatments, one with a seed treatment, the other with a soil application. Both showed positive results compared to the nontreated control. The soil application had the greatest increase in seedling number."

Dr. Landon Rhodes, associate professor of plant pathology, Ohio State University, Columbus, has seen significant differences in plant vigor. In 1989, he also saw yield increases in his alfalfa field trials.

"We have seen noticeable differences in alfalfa plant vigor where Ridomil was applied," said Rhodes. "The plants are taller and have a healthier appearance. In 1988, conditions were dry and not conducive to disease. In 1989, however, disease conditions

existed and we saw significant yield increases and increased plant vigor."

Rhodes tested Ridomil at one- and two-plant rates on untreated seed. The best results were from the one-pint rate, which increased dry matter yields nearly 1,000 pounds.

"This is a substantial yield increase in the seedling year," said Rhodes. "We plan to continue monitoring the field to determine a yield history. Because of the conditions in 1988, we don't have significant information for second-year results." (1990 information is not yet available.)

Ciba-Geigy, in cooperation with several universities, has significant research data on Ridomil's ability to improve alfalfa stands by controlling seedling diseases. Tests completed in the Northeast show stand increases of 14 percent with one-pint broadcast applications of Ridomil. Tests conducted in the West and Midwest show similar stand increases of 11 percent to more than 20 percent depending on conditions.

Ciba-Geigy and university researchers stress that although the fungicide controls seedling diseases, and improves seeding-year stands, plant vigor and yields, it is not a substitute for good management. "Controlling disease is important, but if growers don't cover the basics of good manage-

ment, the disease control is almost pointless," said Rhodes. "To produce the best possible alfalfa, growers need to start with soil tests and fertilize to get the proper nutrients in the soil."

Fertility is one basic management practice. Other practices to consider include soil type/site selection, variety, insect control, and harvest schedule.

Many production practices vary with location, but most university researchers agree on some basics, such as a suitable site for alfalfa. "The soil must allow for good root development," said Vern Marble, extension agronomist, University of California, Davis.

Once the field is selected and properly prepared, the variety used should be adaptable to the area, with a performance record that meets expectations.

Marble encourages growers to monitor for insects. Weeds and pests such as gophers and rabbits also should be controlled.

A harvest management schedule is very important. In California, Marble says growers should cut their alfalfa at the bud stage. In Ohio, Rhodes suggests a schedule based on standard time intervals rather than growth.

Production practices and harvest scheduled will vary. Alfalfa growers should check with their local extension agent for recommendations in their area.

Franklin Co. Extension Board Reorganizes

CHAMBERSBURG (Franklin Co.) — Linda Bender, 1118 L. W.E., Chambersburg, was recently elected president of the Franklin County Cooperative Extension Association board of directors. Reorganization of the board took place February 11 at the County Administration Building, Chambersburg. Bender, presently in her third year on the board, had previously served as vice president.

Other officers elected for the coming year include vice president, Clifford Hawbaker, Chambersburg; secretary, Fran Horst, Orrstown; and treasurer, John Hart, chief clerk of the Franklin County board of commissioners. Board members elected to fill the remaining two seats on the executive committee included Diana Meyers, Chambersburg and J.

Wilmer Lehman, Willow Hill.

Other reorganizational activities included the appointment of county representatives to the Capital Region Cooperative Extension executive board. Selected to serve 2-year terms were J. Wilmer Lehman, delegate and Herbert Zeger, Antrim Builders' Supply, Greencastle, alternate delegate. These joined Jeffrey L. Grove, Shippensburg, and Frank S. Beckner, B Equip, Waynesboro, who are presently also serving as delegate and alternate delegate, respectively, to the regional board.

The county board also set the time and place of the association's 1992 annual meeting. It will be held Friday, January 17, 1992, at Kauffman's Community Center. Snow date is Saturday, January 18.

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