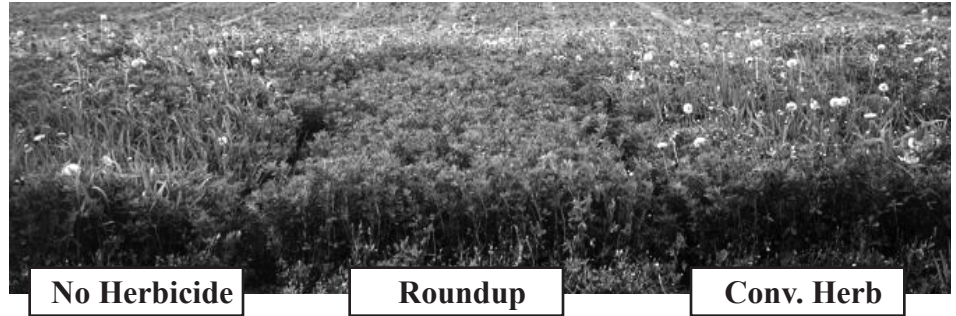


Roundup Ready® Alfalfa Offers Growers More Management Options

by Joe Waldo, NK Brand Seeds

In late July, alfalfa joined the ranks of biotechnology-enhanced crops with the introduction of Roundup Ready Alfalfa by a handful of seed companies. The main benefit of this exciting technology is that it allows growers a simpler way to more consistently produce high-quality alfalfa feed due to fewer weeds, more application flexibility and superior crop safety.



But equally important, this technology gives our Midwest alfalfa growers more options for new or improved management practices. The value of improved stand establishment in the seeding year through the elimination of weed competition may be as significant as the value of the extra forage and quality produced.

The following is a brief discussion of some of the stand establishment benefits that Roundup Ready Alfalfa can provide:

Direct Seeding. This is the most obvious use for RR alfalfa. Trial data have shown the Roundup system controls a broader spectrum of weeds than competitive systems with improved crop safety and more flexibility in timing of applications. The result – the extra alfalfa produced and the higher quality resulting from the RR system in the first year alone can be worth \$30-\$80/acre. Equally important, without weed competition, more seedlings are able to survive for healthier, thicker stands.

Use with Cover/Mulch Crops. In situations where a cover or mulch crop is needed to avoid erosion, Roundup can be used to eliminate not only the cover crop, but also the weeds. This can result in higher yields of weed-free, pure alfalfa hay produced from the seeding-year cuttings rather than a mixture of cover crop, weeds and alfalfa. Reduced competition also means better stands for more productivity.

Use with Forage Companion Crop. Growers who need extra feed for dry cows or heifer feed and use a forage crop (like oats or peas & oats) when establishing alfalfa seedings, can still benefit from the Roundup system. Once the forage crop is harvested, Roundup can be used to eliminate weeds and volunteer oats that can be significant competition for new seedlings still trying to get established. In addition, it can allow for the harvest of additional weed-free hay in the seeding year and result in cleaner fields for future years.

Use with Grain Companion Crop. A major problem with using a companion crop harvested for grain as a cover crop is that remaining weeds are seldom removed after the grain is harvested. These weeds continue to be competition for the struggling seedlings as well as a major deterrent to quality over the life of the stand. Using Roundup to remove both the weeds and volunteers in the fall after grain harvest allows the seedlings to get better established before the first winter, as well as result in weed-free stands with better quality.

Summer Seeding. There is not a lot of summer seeding in the Midwest, most is done after harvesting grain or vegetable crops and planting is often done into a seedbed of weeds and/or volunteer grain. These plants compete with alfalfa seedlings for the limited late summer moisture, which can be the difference between getting a stand established vs. not getting enough fall growth to make it through the winter. Roundup can eliminate this competition and improve odds of getting successful stand establishment. Plus, weeds that do get established can be simply eliminated the next spring with a quick hit of Roundup.

Mixed Stands. At first glance, it may appear RR alfalfa will not work in mixed stands where forage grasses are desired. But RR alfalfa allows establishment of weed-free alfalfa and the interseeding of forage grasses later, so only alfalfa and the desired grass species will be present.

Renovating Pastures. RR alfalfa can also be used to clean up weeds in existing pasture and still produce forage. It may take a year or two to remove all of the undesirable species due to the amount of weed seeds which have accumulated. Then, interseed the desired species, which over time will take over as the alfalfa ultimately thins out.

As growers begin to plant Roundup Ready alfalfa and utilize the significant benefits of this new alfalfa weed control system, even more useful management options will be found. For now, these are just a few ideas on how this technology may be used to improve specific management systems and alfalfa profits.

