

Harnessing the Power of Plant Health on Alfalfa

After a drought-ridden 2012, farmers across the Midwest share the same wish for 2013 – plenty of rain. While a wet growing season would go a long way toward improving last year's yields, alfalfa growers know this reward does not come without a risk.

"When you get those moist, wet, humid conditions, it's not uncommon, especially on the first cutting, to lose the bottom foot, foot and a half of your leaves to diseases," said Ron Schuh, agronomist for the Harmony Country Cooperative in Spencer, WI.

Losing this amount, especially if it happens continually, can eat into a large chunk of your yields and profits. Even the leaves that remain are not immune – suffering from reduced palatability and lowered nutritional value.

In the past, farmers could not do much to prevent this from happening. "All you could do was just cut, wait for it to dry out, and hope for a better crop next time," Schuh said.

But waiting and hoping is not a sound strategy. Fortunately, there is another way.

Alfalfa growers can now apply many of the same fungicides, such as Headline® fungicide from BASF, that corn and soybean growers have been using for years – protecting their crops from spring black stem, common leaf spot, summer black stem, rhizoctonia, and other foliar diseases. Since the crops are no longer wasting energy fighting these diseases, they can devote more energy to growing.

The most effective fungicides build upon this, using other capabilities to further enhance yields. These capabilities are known as Plant Health.

"Plant Health is built upon three pillars – disease control, growth efficiency and stress tolerance. To maximize yields, you need all three," said Paul Vassalotti, Technical Service Representative, BASF. "Headline fungicide allows for more efficient photosynthesis, strengthening crops against harsh environmental conditions."

And these heightened yields do not just exist in theory. In 2012, a series of 56 trials were conducted in various parts of the country (Wisconsin, Michigan, Idaho, Kentucky, and Oklahoma) that tested the effectiveness of Headline fungicide (6 fl. oz/acre) and compared it with untreated fields on the same plot of land. Fields treated with Headline fungicide yielded 2.61 tons/acre of alfalfa, while untreated land yielded 2.26 tons/acre – a difference of 15.5%.

When yield and forage analysis results were plugged into the Milk 2000 program, the output (pounds of milk per ton alfalfa) from the alfalfa treated with Headline fungicide was 2.5% higher than the untreated alfalfa. Additionally, Headline fungicide applications in alfalfa are resulting in more palatable feed. Contact your local BASF representative for more information.