

Weed-Free Alfalfa Positively Impacts Herd Average

Dave Hallberg, NEXGROW



Making the switch from conventional to Genuity® Roundup Ready® alfalfa can be a big decision for a grower. NEXGROW® recently had the opportunity to talk with one of its growers about his decision to move all of his acres to Genuity Roundup Ready alfalfa and his in-field experience with the technology.

Joe Fetzer of Fetzer Farms in Maiden Rock, Wisconsin has been farming his 2,300 acre family farm for the last 29 years. He farms with his two brothers and his son, milking 1,300 Holstein cows while raising corn and alfalfa.

Fetzer initially began planting Genuity Roundup Ready alfalfa when it came on the market in 2006, and was in the process of converting all of his acres from conventional. "But, we had to abandon that system when the moratorium was put into place."

Genuity Roundup Ready alfalfa products were available to producers during the 2006 planting season, but a 2007 lower court injunction prohibited selling or planting. Growers, like Fetzer, were able to keep their fields, but couldn't plant additional seed. In June 2010, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the lower court's order, but the product was still regulated pending an Environmental Impact Study. This study, completed in December 2010, provided the basis for the USDA decision to deregulate Genuity Roundup Ready alfalfa on January 27, 2011.



The opportunity to reinstate next generation Genuity Roundup Ready alfalfa into his rotation is one that Fetzer was waiting for. This year, Fetzer added 200 acres of Genuity Roundup Ready alfalfa and plans to do the same in the years to come.

Growers only have one chance to establish a stand of alfalfa, and the best stand that can be expected begins with seeding. Controlling weeds at stand establishment reduces competition, thus allowing for a good environment to establish that stand. Controlling all weeds allows for a high yielding stand of quality hay.

Fetzer credits the technology for the high quality forage he is able to pass on to his herd.

"It's important to bring in our first cutting of alfalfa clean, instead of having weeds," says Fetzer. "Top quality forage is a huge concern for us to yield high herd averages. Genuity Roundup Ready affords us the opportunity to bring in the best quality crop we can and as a result, we've been among the top five farms in our county as a top producing herd."

While planting Genuity Roundup Ready alfalfa is an investment, Fetzner feels his return is found in the bulk tank at the end of the day.

“You know it’s going to be good alfalfa,” he continues. “We’ve had enough years with weeds and grass coming in with our first cutting. But if you can get one more cutting of just pure alfalfa, in that first year, I feel that you pay back your investment in the technology. Everything gets fed to the cows, so top quality forage is a huge concern for us.”

Whether you are a dairy producer, beef producer, or commercial hay grower, alfalfa plays a vital role in your operation. With more than 17.7 million acres of alfalfa harvested in 2013, alfalfa is the fourth-most widely grown crop in the U.S. surpassed only by corn, soybeans, and wheat.

With limited herbicide options available, the ability to use a herbicide such as Roundup, on alfalfa without hurting the crop, is a substantial advantage for growers. Deterring weed competition allows for higher quality, higher yielding alfalfa forage.

When assessing a crop mix, growers should consider crop safety when evaluating the options between conventional and Genuity Roundup Ready varieties. While there are products on the market today that may control certain weeds during establishment they can have limitations on timing of application and may cause stunting of the plants after application.

In short, there are many options for farmers when they are looking to plant alfalfa. Such choices should be made in consultation with your local seed agronomist, advisor, or dealer.