

Tactics for feathertop Rhodes grass management

RECENT rain through New South Wales and Queensland has resulted in large weed burdens, many growers have completed their first spray using a glyphosate-based application, and are now expressing concern about how to deal with survivors.

Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC) Crop Protection Manager – North, Vicki Green, said growers and agronomists had reported widespread cases of feathertop Rhodes grass (FTR) and barnyard grass (BYG) not responding to initial fallow control treatments.

“While it is not surprising that these naturally tolerant and/or resistant weeds have survived the initial glyphosate treatment, there had been some talk that the prolonged dry may have resulted in significant depletion of the seedbed, especially that of FTR,” Vicki said.

“It would appear that seed survival and spread during the drought has been greater than expected, and so growers are now looking for options to control what are, in many cases, large survivors.

“Ideally, growers should only apply Group A herbicides to

small weeds in order for them to work reliably. If there are situations where growers need to clean up a glyphosate ‘failure’ then we highly recommend not using Group As on large weeds.

“If growers try to use high rates of a Group A herbicide to control escapes they are likely to end up with more failures than successes, as well as possible plantback issues.”

For a more effective, strategic approach, experienced weed specialist Mark Congreve, a senior consultant with Independent Consultants Australia Network (ICAN), has the following recommendations for growers:

SCENARIO: What can growers do if they have already used a first spray of glyphosate and have survivors/resistant FTR or BYG?

ADVICE: Most likely this will require cultivation, before the plants set seed. If there is only the odd plant, match the strategy to the size of the problem and get out the chip hoe. There is no legal herbicide option that is going to work reliably on large FTR or glyphosate resistant BYG that has survived a glyphosate spray (this includes any double knock options).

Added to this, there are serious supply issues with almost all fallow knockdown herbicides, so Mark recommended keeping these herbicides for the next flush of small weeds, where they were most likely to be effective.

Following a successful cultivation to remove existing weeds, growers have several options:

- More cultivation as required, until the winter planting window opens; or,
- Immediately after cultivation, follow up with an isoxaflutole-based residual (e.g. Palmero TX, Balance) and then commit to planting chickpea. This will keep further germinations at bay until the chickpea planting window opens.
- Wait to see if there are subsequent germinations and then treat small seedlings with Shogun, followed by a paraquat double knock. This will be suitable if planting winter broadleaf crops, but Shogun has a four-week plantback period for winter cereals so the window for this treatment is rapidly closing. (Note that Shogun is the only Group A herbicide that has a label claim that could support this use/timing close to the cereal planting window.)

Mark said where growers were not prepared to cultivate, it may be possible to ‘slow down’ the escapes by applying the maximum registered rate of paraquat as a medium/coarse spray quality with water rates of 100 litres per hectare or more, depending on the weed size (thorough coverage was essential, so travel slowly).

“This will not kill large weed escapes, but will probably set them back significantly and stop seed set for a few weeks. This may give more time to allow the cultivation to be completed,” he said.

“Multiple applications of paraquat ‘may’ eventually kill large grasses, if you keep applying it every time the plant tries to reshoot.

“There is no specific time required for the subsequent application, although it needs to be applied after green shoots are present, and this will depend on rainfall/soil moisture.”



Ideally, growers should only apply group A herbicides to small FTR plants. Cultivation is one option suggested for control of larger FTR plants. (Photo supplied)

SCENARIO: Can growers expect subsequent FTR germinations or will it all come up with the first rain?

ADVICE: Mark said it was likely to still be warm enough for FTR to germinate on any follow-up rain during March or April.

“In previous ‘wet’ summers there have been multiple germinations on rainfall events, so it is possible this will happen this season if wet weather continues. It will depend on seed levels in the soil,” he said.

“We have been surprised by the amount of FTR germinating in recent weeks, following a couple of very dry summers. We really are still learning about the behaviour of this weed.”

It is a statement supported by Vicki.

She said feedback from both researchers and growers had reinforced that FTR knowledge and management remained a high priority across both Queensland and NSW.

“To help growers manage FTR, the GRDC has just invested in a new project to further develop industry’s understanding of the ecology and management of this weed,” Vicki said.

“We have already done extensive research into FTR in northern NSW and Queensland, and this new project will focus on extending information to growers via field days, workshops, publications and media.

“In southern NSW there will be additional trial work to understand FTR behaviour on different soils and within different farming systems, with extension to follow the completion of these trials.”

Growers and agronomists will start to see these research activities roll out from this winter.

For more information on managing FTR the GRDC has produced a series of Know More videos and factsheets:
Understanding and controlling feathertop Rhodes grass
Controlling feathertop Rhodes grass | Part 1
Controlling feathertop Rhodes grass | Part 2
Group A herbicides in fallow



Weed specialist Mark Congreve from ICAN said there were several options for growers when it came to controlling feathertop Rhodes grass that had not responded to initial fallow control treatments. (PHOTO: GRDC)

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