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Editorial...

David Dowling, Editor

Integrated pest management is one of those feel good, motherhood terms which everyone in agriculture supports, or at least pays lip service to. The concept has been around for many decades, and at the risk of showing my age, I'd have to say it has come a long way since I became involved in the cotton industry at the end of the 1970s.

Even then, most farmers and consultants supported the idea of keeping beneficials and predators in the crop for as long as possible, from both an environmental and economic viewpoint. There were a few problems though. Firstly, there was not enough quantitative information on the positive effects of beneficials in the crop. More importantly, growers and consultants often didn't have the right tools to safely operate a true IPM.

Someone, perhaps General George Patton in World War 2, said that: "No plan survives beyond the first contact with the enemy." In cotton pest management terms, that meant that most managers reached for the phone to order a plane as soon as they saw damage in the field, especially after the first call from a nervous grower. In many ways, these were rational decisions because damage was expensive and chemicals were very cheap, especially endosulfan and pyrethroids which worked a charm for a few years.

We all know the problems this caused. Resistance to the wonder chemicals soon appeared and it took a massive effort by the whole industry to develop and follow resistance management plans until the new holy grail of GM cotton arrived. Hopefully, the resistance plans in place to protect this amazing technology will keep it effective for decades to come.

But has GM cotton allowed us to become complacent? Heliothis have been largely taken out of the equation, but there are plenty of other problems out there (mirids, whitefly, mealybugs, etc) to which the same IPM concepts apply. Bollgard has been a wonderful opportunity to introduce truly effective IPM systems into our pest management, but that has not always been the case.

Luckily we have been served by some fantastic research and extension people who have pointed the way. And some great young (and old) crop management professionals who understand the concepts and apply them properly. Managers such as Matt Holding who shares his thoughts (page 32) about the complexities of IPM over the past couple of seasons.

At this stage, we are unsure of what sized crop will be available to manage this year as we play the waiting game for spring planting rains. The irrigated crop may be well down but there is still a chance of big dryland plantings. Good luck to everyone.

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