

News Column

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SOYBEAN HERBICIDES

I was sitting on the couch at my brother's house near Salina watching the K-State football game on TV. K-State was struggling both offensively and defensively – although we eventually won that game 25-24 over Texas Tech – and I was struggling to hear the commentators as my wife and sister-in-law visited non-stop throughout the entire game.

My brother is really good guy, so he never said a word about the chatter; he just turned on the closed captioning feature on his TV so he could read what he couldn't hear. I followed his lead and refrained from asking the wives to find another place to visit.

Maybe your closed captioning is better than ours, but there is always an annoying delay when I try to use that function, and this day was no different. The printed words would pop up on the screen a couple of seconds after the spoken words, and the camera was often already onto another play by the time the captioning appeared, describing the previous play.

It actually was a great day with family and I'm smiling as I write this, thinking back to how happy my wife and sister-in-law were as they visited non-stop for three hours. At the time though, I was frustrated my team wasn't playing better, a bit annoyed with the constant chatter, and distracted by the closed captioning.

Oh, and then there was that soybean field across the road — it was really hard to concentrate on the game with that weedy soybean field in the background.

The first thing I noticed while driving to my brother's house was that soybean field. The

soybeans looked good, and ready to harvest, but the weeds were plentiful. It reminded me of the first year glyphosate really struggled to do the job around here and I had the kids out pulling weeds by hand. The pigweeds (waterhemp and palmer amaranth) were about a foot taller than the soybeans.

The farmer had pulled into the corner of the field for a test cut, but I'm guessing the weeds were too green to harvest. The beans sure looked ready, but the combine had moved on, leaving a pickup and header trailer behind.

I asked my brother about the field and he said the previous farmer had tried to no-till for too many years and now they had glyphosate resistant pigweeds. He said the new tenant had tilled the field and still had weed problems.

I bristled a bit as he blamed the problem on no-till, then regained my composure and explained to my non-farmer brother that there are other herbicides and they just needed to switch to a different herbicide technology.

When weeds first became resistant to glyphosate, many farmers switched to Liberty. LibertyLink technology had been around for a while, and was effective, but wasn't as widely used as glyphosate because it was more expensive. When glyphosate stopped working, farmers planted LibertyLink crops, applied Liberty herbicide, and had clean fields again.

Then, along came the dicamba resistant crops. Xtend soybeans (dicamba resistant) were first planted in 2017 and by 2018 Xtend beans were planted on 49% of the soybean acres in the United States.

The Xtend concept was effective, as is evidenced by its quick adoption, but there were challenges with off-target dicamba movement. Some farmer solved the off-target movement problem by just planting more acres to dicamba tolerant beans. The philosophy was that if the

neighbor is spraying with dicamba, then I need to plant dicamba tolerant beans.

The next step in soybean herbicide technology was 2,4-D resistance — Enlist soybeans. Enlist soybeans were first available in 2019, more widely available in 2020, and were gaining more acres in 2021.

Now, as we get ready for the 2022 growing season, we have all of the previously mentioned herbicide technology systems available, plus crops with tolerance to different combinations of those same herbicides.

There is no excuse for having a field with more weeds than soybeans. We just need to choose the right technology and order the seed that will work with the herbicide we want to use.

Some farmers have already ordered seed and others will be ordering in the next few months. Planting is six months away, but the planning needs to happen now.

If you have questions, you can reach me at the Riley County Extension Office at 785/537-6350. Or, you can send e-mail to gmcclure@ksu.edu.

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