

NO-TILL FARMER

APPLY PARAQUAT BEFORE HARVEST?

Some Great Plains wheat farmers have been toying with the idea of applying Paraquat several weeks before wheat harvest to kill troublesome weeds and grasses and to reduce their competition for vital soil moisture.

But Darryl Smika, USDA agronomist at Akron, Colo. notes that early applied Paraquat will cut wheat yields.

"Paraquat is a desiccant and will dry the wheat up right along with weeds. Consequently, it cannot be applied as long as 3 to 4 weeks before harvest," Smika says.

"However, we've been experimenting with an application of Paraquat about a week before harvest to speed up maturity of the wheat plant while killing weeds at that time."

Smika cautions that this is strictly experimental work and carries no recommendation. "But at the same time, there are several advantages in being able to harvest wheat early," he says.

"By cutting wheat about a week sooner, you're reducing the risk of damage through hail storms. It's also easier to kill weeds since they're not as mature. By killing weeds before harvest, you're also reducing their competition for moisture. You may also want harvest out of the way earlier so you can plant a second crop sooner."

Smika notes one of the drawbacks of using Paraquat as a pre-harvest desiccant is that test weight of grain is reduced somewhat—up to a pound or two per bushel.

In addition to looking at Paraquat for this use, Smika is also working with an experimental growth regulator for the same purpose.

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