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Managing Weed Pressure

The wet spring of 2015 won't soon be forgotten for a lot of reasons. Unfortunately, one of those reasons may be weed pressure that carries on in to 2016! Weed management programs are as complex and field dependent as they've ever been. While we're fortunate to have a number of excellent herbicides on the market, proper use of those herbicides is more important now than ever before.

University of Missouri Extension Weed Scientist Dr. Kevin Bradley recently wrote an article about the weed pressure producers in his state may face as a result of the mass of prevented planting acres they saw this year. Even though our focus may not be as much on prevented planting acres, his tips provide an excellent basis for any weed management program.

One of the great points he makes is in regards to looking at more than just herbicides as a part of your weed management program. Non herbicide 'control' efforts are little more than an afterthought most of the time because we depend on the herbicide 'cover up' any mistakes. That could be changing, however. Instead, it may be a great time to further fine tune our cultural best management practices to better support our weed control program.

If you've been holding out on moving to narrower rows, is that an option that could help? Are plant populations where they need to be to adequately help with weed suppression? Should your crop rotation be changed/expanded/fine-tuned? That could include a different rotation or even cover crops. What about the 'T' word? Is tillage (where appropriate!) an alternative? When combined with an effective herbicide program, any or all of these might have a place. If they keep you from a weed pressure disaster while reducing herbicide resistance, maybe it's time to take another look!

The full text of Dr. Bradley's article can be found on the University of Missouri Integrated Pest Management Newsletter website at: <http://ipm.missouri.edu/IPC/M/2015/9/Are-you-ready-for-the-weeds/>.

Preventing Sunscald on Thin-Barked Trees

Tree evaluations this summer revealed a number of instances of damage to trees from sunscald. Particularly affected were our maples, but any young, smooth, thin-barked species such as oak, ash, and many fruit trees have been known to show sunscald symptoms.

Sunscald and bark cracks typically develop on the south/southwest side of trees during late winter. They occur when sunny, warm winter days heat the bark to relatively high temperatures (Georgia research has shown that the trunk on the southwest side of a peach tree can be 40 degrees warmer than shaded bark!). When temperatures increase, we can lose cold hardiness of bark tissue allowing cells in the bark to become active. That would be fine – if temperatures didn't drop! When temperatures drop at night, the damage can be lethal with damaged bark tissue becoming sunken/discolored in late spring before cracking and falling off.

Sunscald isn't a death sentence – if trees are taken care of. That means watering during dry weather for starters. It may also include the use of a light colored tree wrap from the ground to the start of the first branches on recently planted trees. Wrap trees in October/November and remove in March to prevent damage to trees. Continue to monitor to make sure healing occurs.