

Weed wiper continues to evolve as control strategy for pastures

By **KATHY COATNEY**

THE “weed wiper” continues to spread across the U.S., evolving as a practical and sometimes economical method of weed control.

Weed wiper technology has been used to treat a variety of weeds, including pigweed, smutgrass and johnsongrass. It can be pulled behind a tractor, truck or all-terrain vehicle. An adjustable, rotating carpeted drum applies the chemical.

The drum is set at the height of the targeted weed so it only makes contact with those weeds. As it wipes the weeds, the herbicide is applied to the undersides of the leaves and stem, which are the weakest parts of the plant.



Tests in California

In California, Glenn Nader is having some success with research on weed wiper technology for irrigated pastures. Nader is a University of California Extension livestock and natural resources adviser in Yuba County.

He did a test trial that killed mint, chicory and smutgrass without damaging the rest of the pasture.

“Anything they [cattle] weren’t grazing that was up high enough, we were effectively controlling,” he says.

The biggest challenge Nader found was with the trigger that releases the chemical. It is not a “regulated” system with regular discharge, he explains. Not only does it get tiring to push, but learning how often to push it was also an issue.

With further experimentation, however, Nader thinks the weed wiper will probably use less and less herbicide as he gets more comfortable with the equipment.



SELECTIVE TOOL: Glenn Nader of California says he controlled several pest species of grasses and forbs with this weed wiper in irrigated pasture. He says cattle had the preferred forages grazed short, so the weed wiper only treated unwanted plants.



MANUAL CONTROL: One of the most difficult things to learn is when to press the button to release more herbicide into the drum.

“I’m very optimistic about the technology,” he adds.

Triumph in Texas

Alan McNeill, a beef producer and owner of McNeill Cattle Co. in Beaumont, Texas,

uses a weed wiper to control smutgrass.

McNeill tried everything from mowing to aerial spraying to spot spraying. “It’ll kill it momentarily, but it’ll pop up again,” he says.

When he first used the weed wiper, he used a very weak mixture and didn’t believe it would be strong enough to kill the resilient smutgrass. He was surprised to discover it worked, and since that initial use, he’s successfully treated more than 100 acres.

“I’m not fooling myself. I don’t think I’ve stamped it out. I think that there will be

Get started: Tips for trying a weed wiper

Glyphosate (Roundup) seems to be the most commonly used herbicide in weed wipers, but other herbicides can work, too.

Most manufacturers suggest getting herbicide recommendations from a weed control expert in your area. They also suggest mixing a small amount and testing it on the target plants before mixing large amounts.

Allowing for variances in the weed targeted and the herbicide chosen, an appropriate starting place may be 5% herbicide (20 parts water and 1 part chemical). It may be possible to cut that in half as long as the wiper stays wet enough.

The manufacturers also say mixing herbicides can be very effective.

a second growth, if for no other reason than the seed head went into the ground,” McNeill says.

“I’ve had very good luck with the machine. It’s simple, and you can pull it with a four-wheeler,” he adds.

McNeill says he also found there is a learning curve to operating the trigger.

Robert and Madeline Brock, owners of Brock Ranch in Apple Springs, Texas, also use a weed wiper to combat smutgrass, and they are considering using it on blackberry vines.

The Brocks bought a 10-foot tractor mount unit because they can raise and lower it using the PTO, a real time-saver.

Frugality in Kentucky

Mike Whitehouse is using a weed wiper to control johnsongrass in his hay fields. He owns Red Gate Equestrian Center in Nicholasville, Ky.

Whitehouse says johnsongrass is difficult to eliminate, but with each use of the weed wiper, he thins out more of it. He expects it will be a two- to three-year process to eliminate it because there’s just so much seed in the ground.

Whitehouse says because the weed wiper only treats the weeds, it stretches the herbicide. He says fewer than 2 quarts of herbicide covered 30 acres.

“It really helps the chemistry go a long way. That’s what I really like about it,” he says.

Coatney writes from Corning, Calif.

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