

TALKIN' COTTON

By Dr. J.C. Banks

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We are again observing a lot of hormone herbicide damage to cotton in all cotton producing areas in the state. Several conditions have caused this problem to be worse this year than in normal summers. The constant day and night winds during June made it very difficult for producers to spray their no-till wheat ground and milo acres without causing drift and damage to the sensitive cotton. Many of them include a hormone broadleaf herbicide as a tank mix with the glyphosate herbicide to increase activity on broadleaf weeds. Usually we can be fairly successful in tracing where the drift damage came from, but this year, many cotton fields are receiving multiple hits from different directions at different dates. Please, if you are considering spraying any type of hormone herbicide near cotton, be aware that very small amounts of drift can cause considerable damage to the cotton. I have heard several people state that 2,4-D or other hormone herbicides will not really hurt cotton, but even a light dose will cause a delay in fruiting if applied before bloom, or will cause a loss of bolls if applied during bloom or later. The amount of yield loss depends on late season weather. If we have a really warm fall and late frost or freeze, yield loss will not be as severe as it would if we have a cool fall. A cool fall will not allow the bolls time to mature, and when the crop is terminated by a freeze, the bolls will not be harvestable.

Now, the question is, what do I do about my hormone herbicide damaged cotton. Some people have been recommending extra growth regulators or foliar feeding as well as some other materials that are reported to help the cotton. These options have had a poor track record in helping the plant to pull out of the injury. The best solution is to continue to take care of the plant. If the crop is irrigated, continue to irrigate the plant, irrigated cotton recovers much faster than drought stressed dryland cotton. When the plant starts growing again, it will probably try to develop rapidly due to the absence of fruit to hold the vegetative growth in check. This is the time to apply growth regulators to help get the cotton back into the fruiting mode. Irrigated cotton may require 8-12 ounces, but dryland cotton will seldom require more than 6 ounces, and this should be applied only if the plant is not moisture stressed.

Hormone herbicide applications in the summer have always been a problem with cotton production in this area, but recently with more no-till small grain acres, and higher diesel prices that discourage tillage, this problem is becoming more wide-spread. We have tried education, ODA has tried rules and regula

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tions, but it all boils down to the person making the application, and decisions made just prior to application on the potential of the products to hurt neighboring farmers. Please, try to consider drift potential and sensitive crops when you make herbicide applications.

