

A PCA's Perspective on Weed Control in Vegetables

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Introduction:

Started as a PCA for Coastal Ag-Chemical in 1976.

Listened intently to the older PCAs for their wise experiences.

Went independent in 1980.

Celery has been my main crop over the years, but I have also walked a wide array of other vegetable crops and some strawberries.

What has changed over the years:

Celery

36 years ago we were using Caparol and Lorox. Our main herbicides now are Caparol and Lorox. We use them overall or over the drip hose at a reduced rate. We have used them pre-transplant during the seeder period, but control was weak and weeding was expensive. When was the last time you heard a chemical rep say "We have this new selective herbicide for celery that is unbelievable"?

For grasses we were using Treflan. Efficacy was poor. Progressed to Treflan pre-plant, Poast plus Lorox post-emergent. Results were much better for most grasses. Changed to Prism, Shadow or Select Max (Clethodim). Results were excellent. We have been using the Shadow w/ Lorox for nut sedge suppression. Have been seeing synergy activity. It is the only selective herbicide registered for celery since becoming a PCA.

I have been using surfactants with Lorox for years. Just recently started using a MSO surfactant (Dynamic). I haven't seen any extra phytotoxic effects at all. I have been able to pick up more of the groundsel, larger and the entire burning nettle and knot weed which use to come through the Lorox before.

I had a look at Dual Magnum on nutsedge. At the high rate we got pretty good suppression, but in one trial we had some definite stunting while the other trial looked fine. Nutsedge isn't as bad in Ventura without onions being grown.

The only thing changed in celery for me is the use of Select Max and the use of surfactants over the years.

Cole Crops

How many people remember Tok herbicide? Active ingredient is nitrofen. Tok was banned in the late 70's or early 80's as a mutagen I think. It was the herbicide of choice then: a selective herbicide with no phytotoxic effects at all for both transplants and direct seeded Cole crops. After all these years we still haven't replace it as a truly selective herbicide.

We have some selective herbicides we are using now. Goaltender and Prefar are the two we are using in Ventura County. We use Goaltender on Cabbage and Broccoli and Prefar on the bunched coles like Mustard Greens, Kale and Collards. We also used some Dacthal pre-emergent and AN-20 post-emergent in the past.

Goaltender works really well on transplant crops. You can't use Goaltender on seeded Cole Crops because of the phytotoxins on the cotyledon leaves. It's a good thing that most of the Cole Crops in the county are transplanted because of the lack of a good pre-emergent herbicide. We also can't get it to work during the warmer months of the summer in Ventura County. For some reason we lose almost all activity when the temperature reaches around 90. We have tried timing, surfactants, encapsulating, higher rates etc. We are still looking for an answer to this temperature problem.

Prefar is one of those herbicides that are a better than nothing product. We don't have the correct weed spectrum that it works well on. That's why I call it a better than nothing product. You are still going to weed the field if you use Prefar.

Leaf Lettuce

Started using Kerb in 1976. Kerb is still the best herbicide on leaf lettuce now, if you can get it. We really need re-registration on this product. Any other product is a better than nothing product. Prefar is the only other choice. Another reason that we need the registration of Caparol on Cilantro is the only product registered is the ineffective Prefar.

With the lack of effective herbicides we my growers are more aware of keeping their fields cleaner through weeding. One dirty crop and you are paying for that problem for the next 5 years. We are also looking at the neighboring areas for volunteer weeds that may blow in such as groundsel, thistle and ragweed. We've had problems with manure spread on our ground, which was stored next to weedy surroundings. You have to make sure anything spread on your field is clean.

What can we do in the future? Try different things and keep an open mind. Think outside the box. You never know what is going to work.