

A Growers Experience with Summer Annual Weed

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Newhall Land and Farming Company raises about 3500 acres of alfalfa hay in Madera and Merced Counties, growing semi-dormant varieties on alkali soils that vary from sandy loams to clay loams. We are able to maintain a stand for three to four years.

Our two biggest problems are the loss of a stand, and the growth of water grass during the fourth and fifth cutting each summer. The actual problem is caused by the stand loss. It would be helpful if there was herbicide or combination management/herbicide programs to stop this water grass from growing. Depending on the severity of the water grass, we must discount the hay price by as much as thirty dollars per ton.

Our weed control program has been to sheep off the growth in November and December, then by aerial application apply two pints of Paraquat and two pounds of Karmex per acre. This will keep the field clean during the winter and spring and help hold back the water grass in the summer. The problem with this of course, is we can't put the Karmex on the first year and we don't apply it the last year. Therefore, we only use Karmex one or two years, but we need it most the last year.

We have used Eptan and believe it is a good herbicide, but because of the poor application in the water run our results are not satisfactory. Velpar looks promising, but it doesn't claim to control watergrass, although it seems to help. One big advantage with Velpar is that it doesn't retard alfalfa growth when it is applied, so the first cutting has had good yields. Velpar plus Karmex looks promising, but may not be the cure.

The solution to the water grass problem is to maintain a stand of alfalfa. If there is a vigorous stand that will grow quickly after cutting and shade the ground, that will then eliminate the water grass and the need to plow out the hay so frequently.

We are trying to correct our deteriorating stands by laser leveling all our fields. The decision to irrigate once or twice between cuttings depends on the soil type and consumptive use. We don't like to shorten the cutting schedules because that has decreased yields and shortened stand life. We also try to get the hay off as quickly as possible and have tried several different chemicals to speed up the drying time.

Our biggest challenge is to maintain a stand of alfalfa. This can be done by doing the proper land preparation and then irrigating correctly. This should be backed up with a herbicide program that will retard the weeds. Hopefully, in the future, there will be a herbicide that will eliminate the watergrass during the last year which could then be followed by any crop the next season.