

HERBICIDE BANS WILL AFFECT CROP PROFITABILITY

Date added: 03/07/07 Pending revocation of products containing Isoproturon and Trifluralin bans under the Water Framework Directive could leave many growers with considerably reduced crop margins in the years ahead unless careful planning is undertaken now, warns ProCam technical director Dr. Dave Ellerton.

ProCam's 4 cast agronomy database shows herbicide costs to be one of the major differences between the efficiency of top 25% producers and average producers but with two of the major chemicals being banned, this gap could now narrow considerably as growers across the UK struggle to control weeds.

"I think the implications of these bans are far greater than many people realise," he says. "Isoproturon has been by far the most used herbicide in cereals in recent years and Trifluralin has played a major role on many arable units. Independent data shows nearly 60% of all farms used one or both of these products in 2006.

"4cast also shows the top 25% of arable producers last year spent £4.99/tonne on herbicides compared with nearly £7.94/tonne for the bottom 25%. It's the single biggest variable cost next to fungicides and one where marked differences can be seen between the best producers and average producers.

"My worry is that many of the top growers will have to increase herbicide costs to the levels now showing for average and bottom 25% of growers and these, in turn, could hit a new level of herbicide expenditure and still not achieve the levels of control they have to. If this happens not only will costs rise, but outputs will fall too as a result of growing competition and then we really will start to see an effect on crop margins across all farms."

Distributors won't be able to sell Isoproturon products after September 2008 and all stocks must be used by June 2009 or else farmers will have to pay for their disposal. All Trifluralin products will probably have to be used by March 2009.

"Crop producers must start thinking now how they are going to deal with this now, as it will be too late once the bans come in. Add in the growing resistance we've now got to many of the chemicals we currently rely on – such as fops and SUs including ALS inhibitors such as Atlantis - and you can see why there are real concerns about a weed explosion in the years ahead.

"There's a couple of new hopefuls on the way such as Flumioxazin (Suminax) and Pyroxsulium (GF1274) which are both pretty comprehensive when it comes to broad leaved weeds but there are holes in their effectiveness against grass weeds. The bottom line is the number of weapons in the armoury is now diminishing fast."

Growers must start talking to their agronomists sooner rather than later regarding future herbicide strategies and everybody must be prepared to move more down the integrated management route, Dr. Ellerton says.

“We must focus on cultivations appropriate to the species in question, burning off stale seedbed with glyphosate, paying attention to rotations, drilling later where necessary, utilising crop competition through seed rates and avoiding resistant weeds going to seed at all costs.

“In terms of optimising product efficacy, correct dose rate is now critical, especially where there is resistance, and optimum application conditions, timing and product choice must all be top priority.”