

Cutting-edge system takes on the weeds of soybean country

By WILLIE VOGT

THE long-awaited announcement right at the end of 2008 from Bayer CropScience means farmers will have new tools for weed control in 2009. Bayer reported that more than 85 companies will be marketing LibertyLink soybeans across the country starting this season.

The firm says there will be enough seed to cover about 1 million acres in maturities from 0.5 to 4.9, which offers growers in a broad swath of soybean country new management options. Whether you raise cotton, canola, soybeans or corn, you'll have a LibertyLink choice of varieties or hybrids in 2009.

For Steve Stevens, a Tillar, Ark., producer, the LibertyLink system is not new. He's been raising cotton with the technology since it was first introduced to the market. "We had some of the first seed available to the producer for trials," he recalls.

Stevens admits it took awhile to find a cotton variety with LibertyLink genetics that was a top yielder in his area, but he

Key Points

- LibertyLink soybeans will be available in 2009.
- Consider rotations to maximize value of the new technology.
- Ignite replaces Liberty as the herbicide for this system.

has and planted 300 acres to the variety in 2008. "It was a top variety for us and the weed control surpasses anything on the market," he notes.

The technology is popular with Stevens because he's found that it's strong on weeds where glyphosate may be weak. "The only thing you have to worry about is when you put LibertyLink crops by Roundup Ready crops. Drift is a concern," he says.

Rotating weed-control technologies is an issue for Stevens.

"Weed resistance is probably No. 1 on the radar right now, and this is a totally different technology from glyphosate," he says. "I want to work on getting into a rotation with the Liberty system. But for



NEW WEED-CONTROL CHOICE: Soybean growers will have LibertyLink varieties available in 2009 in limited supply, offering a new herbicide approach.

this first year of soybeans, there's not a lot of seed available."

Avoiding resistance

While Bayer points out there's no documented resistance to glufosinate (the active ingredient in Ignite), weed scientists say early stewardship now will protect the technology. Ford Baldwin, longtime Southern weed specialist and now a private consultant, says combining this new weed-control technology with conventional approaches offers the best chance for avoiding resistance.

Baldwin notes that with the new trait technologies out there, farmers have a lot of choices. "We've not used enough conventional technology. There are good herbicides out there, but they can't stand alone." He points to Dual Magnum, atrazine and the HPPD class of chemistries, including Balance and Balance Pro, that work well in corn. Combined with herbicide-resistance traits, this offers expanded weed-control flexibility.

"When there's a lot more seed available, we're going to work LibertyLink soybeans into our rotation," Stevens says. "That's probably more like 2010. We don't have any resistance on our farm, and we're working to avoid it." He is hoping to put in at least 100 acres of LibertyLink soybeans for 2009 to start, if he can get the seed.

Whether you're raising cotton, corn or soybeans, the added flexibility of having a new herbicide tolerance trait can help stave off resistance. Then you

can concentrate on the varieties that will provide the top yields for your operation.

Adding to the mix

Baldwin and other weed specialists note that use of LibertyLink crops, glyphosate-tolerant crops and conventional crops can provide a "systematic" type of rotation.

"If we get started on the right foot with LibertyLink, you could rotate it to Roundup Ready soybeans," he notes. "And corn offers the best chance for bringing in conventional herbicides. You can plant LibertyLink or Roundup Ready corn so that you have that option."

The interesting irony in this new-technology news is that while you'll have LibertyLink technology in all those crops, you won't spray with Liberty. Instead, you'll be using Ignite, a new formulation of glufosinate.

"We've cleared the pipeline [of Liberty], and we'll be marketing one product — Ignite — in 2009," explains Andy Hurst, product manager, herbicide tolerance traits, Bayer CropScience. "Ignite is 40% more concentrated than the old Liberty formulation that it will replace."

If you're working more LibertyLink choices into your crop rotation, for 2009 you may have access to those new soybean varieties, too. Consider them another option in the battle for better yields and reduced worries about weed resistance.

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