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## Beware the risks of delayed OSR inputs

Timing applications of metazachlor based herbicides to oilseed rape crops before October, could be key to retaining its future availability.

The pesticide stewardship initiative, Metazachlor Matters, is raising awareness of the risks to water from the weed control active, that's contained in numerous oilseed rape herbicides.

The measures, under the Metazachlor Matters brand, were developed as part a European wide initiative by approval holders Adama and BASF in advance of 2015 plantings, comprising guidelines that set deadlines for autumn weed control treatments that contain metazachlor.

Drained fields, located in drinking water 'Safeguard Zones', should be applied by 1 October. Drained fields not located in Safeguard Zones have the extension opportunity to 15 October, where soil and seedbed conditions are good, and drains are not flowing. There are no restrictions for undrained land.

The timing restrictions come at a time when the viability of growing oilseed rape is being questioned, which may risk herbicide applications being delayed.

Rob Gladwin, head of business development and sustainability at BASF, and representing the Metazachlor Matters stewardship initiative, says that cabbage stem flea beetle and slug pressure are two big reasons why many growers want to see strong crop emergence before committing to herbicide investment.

"The ideal scenario is that products are applied early, onto well-structured seed beds. This ensures they both do their job of protecting newly emerged seedlings from invasive weeds, while also ensuring the active is subsequently broken down and the risk of movement to water later in the season is allayed."

Dinah Hillier is catchment manager at Thames Water. She explains that rigorous drinking water standards demand an improvement in pesticide levels in raw water, even for pesticides such as metazachlor that can be dealt with through conventional water treatment processes. This has diverted attention from treatment technology, to work within catchments to reverse deteriorating trends.

“The Metazachlor Matters stewardship initiative is particularly heartening,” she notes. “Metazachlor is not currently the worst pesticide in the rankings, but it’s still vital to address what we need to do in working together to make sure it stays that way.”

Agrii agronomist Andrew Richards has been advising farmers for over 30 years.

“Oilseed rape has become the most important break crop by far, but the problem is that we have very few active ingredients available to us,” he says. “For broadleaved weeds in particular, we’re dependant on metazachlor and quinmerac based materials. It’s a limited armoury.”

Getting establishment conditions right is however viewed as vital. “We’re looking for a fine tilth on top, to a consistent half inch depth, to allow rapid establishment and prevent both slug issues and vulnerability to adult flea beetles.

“In these conditions, the crop has every chance of being competitive and working in tandem with the herbicide in controlling damaging weeds such as poppy, chickweed, shepherd’s purse and cranesbill. They can defeat a crop if allowed to encroach and there’s a big crop investment at stake, which is why we must do all we can to preserve the tools - including metazachlor - required to grow oilseed rape successfully.”

## Simple measures

Jim Reeve is a fourth generation LEAF farmer based in central Warwickshire, and looks after 530 hectares of 50% owned, 50% contracted land, that ranges from sandy loams to boulder clay. He estimates they have around six miles of land adjoining a watercourse that feeds into Severn Trent Water’s Draycote Reservoir.

Having witnessed a wholesale change in farming attitudes to pesticide use, he says they went from a standpoint of simply not knowing the implications of a single drop of product reaching a watercourse, to being fully trained and informed of the issues.

As well as taking note of pesticide stewardship advice relating to dose rates and timing criteria, he believes that simple measures go a long way. “Just by altering the tramlines so they go across the slope has eliminated surface flow from six to eight times a year, to zero. “It’s made a hell of difference,” he says.

Jim also recognises the value of soil condition, using farmyard manure and cover crops to improve its structure, the biota and nutrition, that all help to reduce run-off. They have also used a grant to invest in a new, fully bunded sprayer facility to store two sprayers and capture run off into pits that delivers treatment on-site and expels only clean water.

“There’s been a wholesale improvement in the professionalism of the industry. We’re all now members of NRoSO and attending regular CPD training,” he concludes.

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