

PERSPECTIVES

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Waiting for Water

Is there an end in sight to continued drought conditions?

The continued drought conditions of western Kansas and eastern Colorado are changing farming practices as producers try to conserve each raindrop and snowflake. Water is a precious commodity in the area – more so now than ever before – and even increasing amounts of moisture in recent months cannot pull the region from persistent dryness.

Mary Knapp, State Climatologist for Kansas, says recent rains in western Kansas have been welcome, but the moisture did little to affect the overall drought conditions of the region.

“With the length of the drought conditions, a week of good moisture makes very little inroads on the overall condition,” Knapp says. “The rains are very welcome, but typical Kansas days with wind speeds averaging upwards of 25 miles per hour and temperatures in the 80s dries things out quickly.”

Knapp notes that recent reports from the National Drought Mitigation Center show extreme drought conditions in the northwest and west central areas of Kansas. Towards the southwest, moderate drought conditions persist, and the eastern edge of Kansas continues to suffer abnormally dry conditions.

Eric Schuck, Assistant Professor at Colorado State University, says similar conditions are persisting in the Front Range area of his state with the region continuing to see light snowfall overall in the Rocky Mountains.

“Currently, the snow pack is still pretty light,” Schuck says. “We’ve achieved about 70% of snow pack in the South Platte region, but

it’s probably going to be less than we needed.”

Changing Practices

The continued drought conditions have forced farmers to change the management of their operations to conserve water and reduce evaporation.

“I’ve been talking with the agronomists in drought areas,” Knapp says. “And what I’m seeing is a movement to no-till operations to maintain ground cover. It not only cuts down on erosion but also helps retain

soil moisture. One farmer I spoke with said that’s the only thing that kept them going and producing yields that could sustain their operation.”

Knapp also says she’s seen a change in the crops Kansas producers are planting with the expansion of cotton planting as well as other crops that require less irrigation. If producers continue to irrigate, Knapp says well-timed scheduling helps reduce the amount of water evaporated.

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Evaluating New Ag Chemicals: The Crop Quest Test



by **Dwight Koops**,
Regional Vice President
Ulysses, Kan.

Making the best chemical recommendation for your operation is a complex equation. First, our agronomists need to understand your farm and specific goals. Second, the chemical has to work effectively.

Crop Quest spends a lot of time getting to know your particular operation. What you may not see are the hours of research we spend getting to know your chemical options. Crop Quest stringently evaluates new herbicides, insecticides, fungicides, growth regulators, fertilizers and additives, as well as crop varieties, to help ensure the product we recommend fits your operation and management goals.

From an agronomic perspective, it is important to understand the technical aspects and real-world applications of a new product. Each year, Crop Quest staff members evaluate new products on the market. It’s a process that helps us find the chemical or crop variety that balances your farm’s equation.

First, we appraise the new product’s chemistry and how it relates to products already on the market. This gives us a clue to the chemical’s pros and cons and a starting point to evaluate the pests controlled, geography, soil or climatic variances, tank mix combinations, overall price and how the pesticide will fit into specific production programs. For instance, if the product is a new pesticide that is part of a family of chemicals, the process can be sped up because we know the product has a similar chemistry and application. For new products with a unique composition, we go through a rigorous evaluation process to make

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QA



by **Ron O'Hanlon**,
President
Member, National
Alliance of Independent
Crop Consultants,
CPCC-I Certified

Q Why are Crop Quest agronomists timid about straying from pesticide labels?

A It is not uncommon for Crop Quest agronomists to hear client requests on the topic of using lower rates of pesticides, using different combinations or using the pesticide on crops other than what the label recommends. First and foremost, the label is the law and any violation of the label can potentially put that person or company in jeopardy of prosecution.

Beyond just the legal effects of straying from directed usage, pesticides simply aren't as reliable when used outside of the manufacturer's label specifications. Through experience, agronomists learn firsthand how pesticides work and get a chance to see those pesticides applied under many different situations. Even though a farmer may have had success using lower rates than recommended, which is allowed in some states, the risk for failure increases with the use of rates lower than listed on the label.

The chemical company is no longer responsible to stand behind its product when the label is not followed. If the farmer understands the risks involved and accepts full responsibility for any potential failure, a Crop Quest agronomist can always assist the farmer in getting the most performance from lower pesticide rates.

On the other hand, the consequences of using pesticides on crops not listed on the product's label or using combinations not approved by the manufacturer far outweigh any perceived benefit. These off-label uses can be potentially damaging to the environment and the farmer's income if the crop is condemned due to an off-label pesticide use.

For more information on the most effective and economical pesticide for your crop, contact your Crop Quest agronomist for the best recommendation and explanation of the product's label specifications.



Water *Continued from page 1*

"There's a lot of interest in using irrigation scheduling," she says. "Timing can make all the difference, and how you place the irrigation can make or break the field."

In the Front Range area, Schuck notes that producers are using some of the same practices to conserve Colorado's water.

"The biggest agricultural change has been converting from irrigated fields to dryland where possible," Schuck says. "In addition, producers also have switched to crops that use less water. There's been some discussion about leasing out water rights."

"Some producers have been planting dryland acres for a couple of years and leasing water rights to someone else to try and reduce their water consumption."

Although Schuck notes that not many producers have implemented the strategy, many operators discussed the possibility during 2002. With urban areas like Denver, farmers with water rights can profitably switch from irrigated to dryland crops and lease their water rights to a municipality.

"Overall, it depends on who you're leasing to," Schuck says. "Leasing to another agricultural interest won't be as profitable as leasing to a municipality, which typically pays 10 times more for water rights."

Schuck notes there have been some recent breakthroughs on facilitating leases. For example, the suburban city of Aurora, Colo., has worked with agricultural interests in the area with water options. Recently, the city has purchased the option to buy water from nearby irrigators.

"The irrigators still own the water rights, but farm in the wet years and sell the water, or option, in dry years," Schuck says. "With an option, the city of Aurora can ask to execute the option to purchase water whenever it is in low supply."

Outlook

Knapp warns that producers should continue to search for ways to conserve water as the cyclical pattern in the High Plains continues to provide little moisture.

"The outlook through the early summer is not bad for western Kansas, with equal chances both of temperature and moisture," Knapp says. "Through July, August and September is a little less favorable."

"We should expect to see above normal temps in the desert southwest expanding out to Kansas," Knapp continues. "If we have above normal temps and normal moisture, evaporation is going to be higher."

"We'll need more moisture to go along with it. A lot will depend on how this season plays out. If we don't get as much variation in temperatures, the outlook will be better. In the case of a string of 100° days, we don't really know how that's going to play out," Knapp concludes.



Get Updated!

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sure we can accurately anticipate how the chemical will respond in your field.

Second, we go beyond the chemistry of the product by reviewing test plots or using the product on a small scale.

Product Testing Required

Crop Quest agronomists will not recommend a new product until we have evaluated its results in real situations. To do this, we try to place the fertilizer, additive, pesticide or new crop variety in situations where we are confident of success.

These protocols are particularly crucial when evaluating hybrids and varieties, especially GMO varieties. Once we build a comfort level with the product, Crop Quest agronomists will begin recommending the product on a broader scale over varying situations.

Many times, new trade names are reformulations of old products with different concentrations of active ingredients or new inert ingredients, which may enhance efficacy. In cases like this, it is important to find out if the reformulation adds any value to the active ingredient.

This process takes some time, but it's a requirement before any product is placed on our "use list." Simply put, we have to have solid data backed up by

our own testing before a product is recommended by our experienced staff.

Our job is to make sure we recommend the best product for each situation and give our customers the greatest chance for success at an economical price.

The chemical manufacturers we work with also appreciate the stringent process as it gives customer feedback for innovative products and applications.

When a product is recommended by Crop Quest, you can be certain that the technical specifications have been researched, the product has been tested under varying circumstances and the results have been evaluated by a network of agronomists unaffiliated with manufacturers or distributors.

Crop Quest's database allows us to evaluate and share these test results faster and more accurately than ever before.

We're currently evaluating this year's crop of ag chemicals and will use our research to continue making the best decisions for your fields and overall operation.

Ask your Crop Quest agronomist for the most up-to-date and accurate information on fertilizers, additives, pesticides, herbicides, fungicides, growth regulators or new crop varieties.

CQ Tested

Here are just a few of the chemicals Crop Quest is evaluating this year. For unbiased, reliable recommendations specific to your operation, contact your Crop Quest agronomist at (620) 225-2233.

Herbicides:

Callisto™
Define™
DPX-E9636 25DF
Gangster®
Lumax®
Option®
Valor®

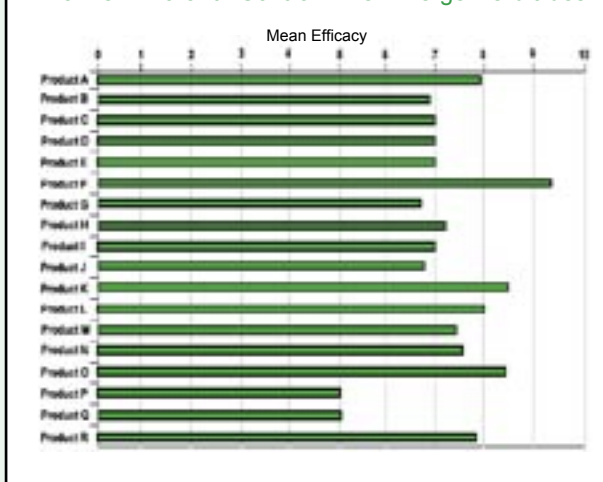
Fungicides:

Headline®
Quilt™
Stratego®

Insecticides:

Mustang Max™
Poncho®
Steward®

Palmer Amaranth Control - Pre-Emerge Herbicides



Crop Quest agronomists evaluate the effectiveness of new ag chemicals by using technical analysis. Charts, such as the one pictured above, help agronomists compare the chemical's effectiveness against other chemicals currently on the market.

Your Crop Quest Consultant: Tim Reh, serving the Dimmitt, Texas, area



Working for Crop Quest runs in the family for agronomist Tim Reh. His older brother, John Reh, is a Crop Quest division manager for the Great Bend, Kan., area.

"I learned about Crop Quest after my brother started working for them," Tim Reh says. "It seemed like a good job and a great way to stay involved with agriculture."

While pursuing a degree in plant and soil sciences from Oklahoma State University, Reh spent four summers interning with Crop Quest. After graduating in 2002, he started consulting

with customers in the Dimmitt, Texas, area.

"Tim has shown great confidence in his ability as an agronomist and has been working hard to meet the needs of his clients," says Kyle Aljoe, Crop Quest Area Manager in Dimmitt, Texas.

The mostly irrigated ground in Reh's service area is quite a change from the dryland fields of his hometown of Inman, Kan.

"Around Inman, it's mostly dryland wheat and milo setups," Reh says. "Down here, they're going to have some of the first dryland crops in several years this season. The area is a big change from my hometown, but it's a new experience."

Tillage System Options



by **Jim Gleason**,
Regional
Vice President
St. John, Kan.

As fuel prices continue to increase, many producers are considering changes that can be made in their operation to make it more efficient.

Asking the straightforward question, “is there a better way to do things?” can help many producers reduce their costs in the long run.

One appraisal many High Plains farmers are beginning to make is the economic difference between choosing chemical weed control or a reduced or no-till cropping system. When a tillage pass is made across a field, it is serving one of two purposes: seedbed preparation or weed control. With cheaper chemicals now available, a producer will need to compare the value of spraying vs. tilling. If the main purpose of the tillage pass is to kill weeds, chemically controlling them will most likely be the cheapest way.

Reduced or no-till cropping systems are a viable alternative when searching for a better option. The systems have been utilized for a long time and are continually refined to make them fit. When diesel fuel was cheaper than the herbicides that would replace it, the adoption rate of reduced or no-till practices was slow. Now, with the change of the economics, these systems are being looked at in a new light.

When the patent protection for Roundup® herbicide expired, a flood of generic glyphosate products soon hit the market. Other chemicals have, or will soon, be coming off patent. One could expect the price for these to drop similar to the price dip of the glyphosate market. It was not too many years ago that a burn-down treatment on fallow ground was more than \$7 per acre. Today, the same treatment is costing less than \$3.50.

Chemicals, when used correctly, can be a cost-effective tool. The same is true for tillage. As technology advances and both options become more reasonably priced, there will be more producers using a combination of the two.



Your Crop Quest Consultant: Jason Reichart, serving the Topeka, Kan., area



Jason Reichart knows his Crop Quest service area – it’s the place where he was born and raised. Staying close to his hometown of Valley Falls, Kan., and serving the region’s agricultural community are two goals Reichart has fulfilled by working as an agronomist near his hometown.

“I wanted to stay around this area,” Reichart says. “I couldn’t imagine living or working anywhere else.”

Reichart began working for Crop Quest while pursuing a degree from Highland County Community College. His first internship with the company was in 1996, and Reichart spent the following four summers scouting fields for Crop Quest clients.

He continued his education at Kansas State University and graduated with a degree in agricultural economics with a minor in agronomy in May 2000.

“It’s been a little over two years since I became a full-time employee,” Reichart recalls. “I like working with Crop Quest, being outside and helping people figure out how to overcome challenges.”

Reichart’s knowledge of the area and its landscape is helpful to his clients, notes Scott Beguelin, Silver Lake Division Manager.

“Jason has excellent agronomic skills,” Beguelin says. “He picks up on new problems quickly and anticipates his customers’ questions. Jason is devoted to his area and works as a team player when the region’s producers need extra projects completed.”



Mission Statement

Crop Quest is an employee-owned company dedicated to providing the highest quality agricultural services for each customer. The quest of our network of professionals is to practice integrity and innovation to ensure our services are economically and environmentally sound.

Crop Quest Agronomic Services, Inc.
Main Office: Phone 620.225.2233 • Fax 620.225.3199
Internet: www.cropquest.com • cqoffice@cropquest.com

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