

## Managing summer grasses in alfalfa

Mark J. Renz  
Extension Weed Specialist  
New Mexico State University

Annual grasses that germinate in the spring and mature in the summer can be very troublesome in alfalfa production systems. As expected these grasses can reduce the quality, quantity and stand of alfalfa. Annual grasses can also cause difficulties in harvesting and certain grasses can irritate the mouths of livestock. Fortunately there are several methods available to manage grasses. Each method will be briefly described below.

*Maintaining stand health/density:* By far this is the most important factor in weed management in alfalfa. Alfalfa is an extremely competitive crop, and if managed properly, it can outcompete weeds that are present in the field. Several factors can cause alfalfa to lose this competitive advantage including age of the field, irrigation practices, proper fertilization, insect damage, disease damage, and cutting frequency. These factors, if mismanaged, can result in areas with low alfalfa density. These areas are where most weed infestations establish, therefore it is critical to manage your alfalfa correctly. If large weed infestations exist, one must determine if the presence of weed populations are symptoms of a mismanaged field. If this is the case, management practices should be altered BEFORE weed management occurs as weeds will quickly return to mismanaged alfalfa.

*Cultural practices* can reduce the severity of annual grass infestations. Cutting hay at longer intervals will allow the alfalfa to compete more effectively with the grasses, and reduce their competitiveness. After cutting, delaying irrigation also can help reduce the competitiveness of the annual grasses. These grasses are more shallowly rooted compared to alfalfa therefore are more sensitive to water stress. Conversely, if fields are irrigated soon after cutting, (1-5 days) grass densities can increase.

*Herbicides:* There are many herbicides available for managing grasses in alfalfa. Typically these herbicides are applied either when the alfalfa is dormant or when the alfalfa is currently growing. Dormant herbicide applications can be relatively inexpensive while offering high levels of control for extended periods. To use these herbicides one must have previous knowledge of weed populations, or have the ability to predict future problems in a field. Because of this, many producers rely on postemergent herbicides applied to actively growing alfalfa. These herbicides allow the producer to wait until a problem is perceived, and then rapidly respond in the same year, while dormant applications can only be applied in the winter months. Since we are in the middle of the active season, postemergent applications to actively growing alfalfa will be emphasized. ***As with all herbicides consult the label before applications as specific information and restrictions are discussed.***

Below is a brief list of postemergent herbicides that effectively control specific weed species common in New Mexico. For more detailed information please consult NMSU Guide A-325, Managing Weed in Alfalfa and University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources Publication 21615, Postemergence Weed Control in Seedling Alfalfa and Phytotoxicity Symptoms.

<u>WEED SPECIES</u>	<u>HERBICIDE</u>	<u>RATE (lbs. ai/A)</u>
Wild barley	Poast	0.375-0.5
	Prism	0.25-1.0
	Raptor	0.032-0.047
Barnyardgrass	Poast	0.375-0.5
	Prism	0.25-1.0
	Pursuit	0.063-0.094
	Raptor	0.032-0.047
	Select	0.25
Large crabgrass	Gramoxone Extra	0.25
	Kerb	1.0
	Poast	0.375-0.5
	Prism	0.25-1.0
	Raptor	0.032-0.047
	Select	0.25
Yellow foxtail	Poast	0.375-0.5
	Prism	0.25-1.0
	Raptor	0.047
	Select	0.25
Wild oat	Poast	0.375-0.5
	Prism	0.25-1.0
	Raptor	0.032-0.047
	Select	0.25
Italian ryegrass	Poast	0.375-0.5
	Prism	0.25-1.0
	Raptor	0.032-0.047
	Select	0.25