

## **CONTROLLING BLUEGRASS IN IRRIGATED ALFALFA**

Bluegrass is a common weed in irrigated alfalfa. Fortunately, there are several ways to control this pesky plant.

Irrigation can really boost alfalfa yields. But weeds like bluegrass often invade, which lowers quality and shortens stand life. Bluegrass competes so well because it likes moisture and it has many basal leaves that help it grow rapidly after alfalfa is cut.

Effective control requires thick alfalfa stands, good water management, and sometimes, herbicides. It is essential to start with thick stands, both to compete with the bluegrass and to have good yield potential after control is achieved.

The key to slowing down bluegrass invasion is irrigation water management. Irrigation must be timed so the top several inches of soil are dry at harvest — and they need to remain dry until alfalfa regrowth is several inches tall. Bluegrass grows slowly in dry soil, but alfalfa roots will use subsoil moisture for regrowth if your previous irrigation stored a supply down below. Once your alfalfa gets a little bit of growth, it will compete well with the bluegrass.

If thick stands and water management are adequate, then herbicides like Select, Poast Plus, or Roundup might be cost effective to weaken or kill bluegrass. Apply any one of these immediately after harvest. Be especially careful using Roundup, though, if your alfalfa isn't RoundupReady. It should be used only if no new growth has developed from your alfalfa. Otherwise, plants could be killed. Of these herbicides, Select may work the best and is safe for your alfalfa.

Bluegrass is a problem in many irrigated alfalfa fields, but it does not need to be. You can control it.

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