



Risks Associated with Grazing or Cutting Failed Crops for Stockfeed

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Introduction

During times of drought and other natural disasters, farmers are often faced with the difficult decision of whether to allow failed crops to continue to harvest, to cut them for stockfeed, or to allow livestock to graze on them.

In most circumstances, a number of pesticides have been applied to a crop throughout the growing season. These pesticides can take the form of herbicides, insecticides, fungicides or any combination of these groups.

When making a decision as to the fate of a failed crop, farmers must take into consideration what chemicals have been used on the crop, because the chemical history of a failed crop may limit what options are available for a crop.

Chemical History

Most growers plan a chemical program for a given crop at the beginning of the growing season. These plans need a degree of flexibility to account for unforeseen events, such as pest problems.

These plans rarely account for crop failure and as a result, any alternative uses of the crop. Regardless of whether the crop is harvested, grazed or cut for use as stockfeed, observing any Withholding Periods (WHPs) are critical to managing chemical residues in the crop and livestock.

Withholding Periods (WHPs)

Withholding periods are detailed on the chemical product label, usually in a specific section after the Directions for Use. They set a minimum period of time that must elapse between the last application of the chemical and the 'use' of the crop. In these circumstances, the 'use' of the crop can be defined as when it is harvested, grazed, or cut for stockfeed.

Withholding periods commonly take the form of the following statement:

'DO NOT harvest for 4 weeks after application'.

According to the WHP outlined above, a farmer would not be permitted to harvest the treated crop until four weeks after the chemical was applied to the crop.



Photo: failed crop cut for hay production

Chemical product labels may contain specific warnings related to the grazing or cutting of treated crops for stockfeed, such as:

'DO NOT graze or cut for stock food earlier than 6 weeks after application'

According to the WHP outlined above, the crop must not be grazed or cut for stock food for at least six weeks after the chemical had been applied to the crop.

Failure to comply with WHP's can lead to unacceptable levels of chemical residues in livestock products such as milk, meat and eggs. The consequences of such residues can be severe for Australian producers, particularly in regard to access to export markets.

Under the *Agricultural and Veterinary Chemical (Control of Use) Act 1992*, it is an offence to sell agricultural produce including hay, that has been made from a treated crop where a WHP has not expired, unless the seller notifies the buyer in writing that the WHP has not expired.

It is also an offence to sell livestock that have entered land or grazed on land where a WHP has not expired, unless the seller notifies the buyer in writing that the WHP has not expired.

The penalty for these offences is a maximum of 200 penalty units for corporations, and 100 in any other case.



Photo: Cattle grazing a failed crop

Vendor Declarations

Vendor declarations are valuable tools available to both sellers and purchasers of stockfeed that ensure clear communication regarding a wide range of issues, including the use of chemicals on stockfeed. The use of vendor declarations such as the Meat and Livestock Australia's (MLA) Commodity Vendor Declarations will help to ensure that the purchaser is fully aware of the chemical history of the stockfeed.

Vendors of livestock that have grazed or been fed failed crops where a WHP has not expired must record this information when completing a National Vendor Declaration as part of MLA's Livestock Production Assurance program.

Conclusion

In order to manage chemical residue risks in stockfeed, farmers must review the chemical history of failed crops in order to determine the status of any WHPs. If a WHP cannot be complied with, the seller must notify the buyer in writing of this fact prior to selling the feed or livestock. The use of vendor declarations is advisable to ensure clear communication between the vendor and purchaser of livestock and stockfeed.

Further information

- DPI Chemical Standards website - www.dpi.vic.gov.au/chemicalstandards
- Meat and Livestock Australia website: www.mla.com.au
- DPI Chemical Standards Officers
 - North West
 - Alan Roberts (03) 5430 4416
 - Dave Rumbold (03) 5430 4806
 - North East
 - Steven Field (03) 5824 5532
 - South West & Port Phillip West
 - Jo Robinson (03) 5355 0522
 - Gippsland & Port Phillip East
 - David Stewart (03) 9785 0173
 - Michael Laity (03) 9785 0191

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