

MH Residues

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MH Residues

The tobacco producers in the flue-cured production area face a growing problem. The problem is maleic hydrazide residue. Jim Hudson, Southeast Farm Press Editorial Staff-person, states that, "For the first time in memory a major European buyer of U.S. flue-cured tobacco refused to purchase any type 14 leaf grown in Georgia or Florida in 1991 because of excessive maleic hydrazide residues." Arnold Hamm told tobacco farmers at the Flue-cured Tobacco Cooperative Stabilization Corporation at the South Carolina Statewide Tobacco Meeting, "We have warned farmers that MH residues on the leaf they offer for sale could cause their tobacco to be rejected by foreign buyers."

Today the foreign market is very important to the flue-cured producers with the decline of domestic tobacco consumption the foreign market is the only place for expansion. The European Economic Community purchases about forty-five percent of the U.S. export market. The European Economic Community finds high MH residues unacceptable. Today in the U.S. MH residues range from zero to nine hundred ninety one parts per million. Some foreign buyers will not tolerate high levels

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of MH residues.

Tobacco farming has become less labor intensive in the last thirty years. Today the tobacco farmer must depend more heavily on chemicals and mechanization to obtain adequate sucker control. The small tobacco farms of my childhood have been replaced with larger 'more efficient' farms. This change is especially true in the Georgia, Florida, South Carolina and North Carolina Border Belts and the North Carolina Eastern Belt. The change in farming practices due to increased farm size partly accounts for these regions having the highest MH residues. The Middle and Old Belts in North Carolina and Virginia have the lowest MH residues. Changes in the past ten years in farming practices and improved tobacco varieties keep the crop in the field longer. When MH was first approved for use in the mid 1950's tobacco did not stay in the field as long as it does today. One application of MH is no longer enough to control suckers in the field. In my area most farmers do not use MH on their tobacco. Instead the plant is topped as soon as the plant has twenty leaves, then Prime+ is applied with a jug or drop nozzles. This method is very effective in my area.

Mh can be used as a sucker control and not present a problem of high pesticide levels. Elevated MH residues create a problem when leaves are harvested too quickly after application or when using drop nozzles too much MH falls on the lower leaves. Over application of MH also causes high residues. Over application

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may be the result of some growers confusion about acceptable application rates of the different MH products.

If a solution to high MH residues is not found the U.S. is in jeopardy of losing a large share of its foreign market. Two of the U.S.'s major competitors for American style flue-cured tobacco do not use MH on their tobacco.

The MH problem is preventable but I think overcoming the problem depends on the farmers willingness to accept MH residues as a problem and then do something about it. The farmer cannot solve this problem on his own. Involvement of Tobacco Extension Specialists is needed. These Specialists can and do carry out research to help the farmer control suckers without excessive MH residues. N.C. Tobacco Extension Specialist, Fred Yelverton has researched specific farming practices that if implemented should provide adequate sucker control and low MH residues. He stresses conservative nitrogen application rates and early application of contact sucker control chemicals. With sufficient information and a variety of sucker control methods which will meet the needs of varied farming conditions the farmer is the key to solving the MH problem.

If all work together to resolve the problem of high MH residues farmers will be informed about the importance of the need to control MH levels. Also the farmer will have alternative and effective procedures for sucker control at their disposal and their will be a strong foreign export market for U.S flue-cured tobacco.

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