

# Consider A Rye Cover Crop To Control Marestalk



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**W**eed resistance to herbicides is becoming a significant issue. In southern Illinois, marestalk or horseweed is one that has shown resistance to glyphosate and now is showing resistance to other herbicides.

Marestalk is a winter annual-type weed that is adapting to our farming practices, germinating from fall all the way into spring.

It is interesting that while many growers struggle to get control, we have seen excellent control using only cover crops. To be specific, the cover crop of choice is cereal rye. A uniform stand of rye will typically give 98 percent control or better in front of no-till soybeans. Trials I have run during the last 20 years in fields with significant marestalk populations in the checks have rarely had any plants in the rye cover crop.

We typically seed cereal rye at 40 pounds per acre, either broadcast with 100 pounds of potash or drilled, and normally don't use more than 50 pounds per acre even when aerial seeded in a standing crop.

Cost depends on supply. Last year, local seed was in short supply. But buying from out West, it was less than \$9 per bushel.

Rye must be properly managed, and you have to pay attention. Plan on killing it when it is fairly short, around April; otherwise, it can get big and deplete soil moisture or mat down and stay wet. Killing the rye is fairly easy with glyphosate and other products.

The added benefit is the allelopathy lasts about three weeks, depending on rainfall, and gives good early weed control. In the last 25 years, we have been monitoring soybean cyst nematodes (SCN) in southern Illinois fields and have found that rye also reduces the nematode numbers. In trials the past four years, we have seen SCN numbers significantly drop when rye is used as a cover crop compared to the no cover check.

So, consider planting a cereal rye cover crop. It controls marestalk, winter annuals and early season annual weeds, reduces nematodes, captures nitrogen and adds organic matter. Better find rye seed early because I suspect supplies will be short.  $\Delta$

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