



Agricultural Services

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Why's of Agriculture: Why do farmers need to spray?

By Aimee Delaney, Ag Relations

The mosquitos are out, the dandelions are growing and the magpies never left. Pests are an often ugly part of life. Even though they may be small in size they do have the potential to cause very big effects on the goals you try to accomplish. When there are so many things to get done in a day already, the appetite for chasing pests all night isn't very appealing so getting ahead of the pests can be a lifesaver.

Often due to the size of a farming operation getting ahead of the pests is the best answer. Luckily in these modern times we have a number of options we can use to help prevent pests from establishing and their damage from getting to destructive levels. By using a mixture of methods or tools to identify pests at their earliest signs, then removing the pests and monitor for them minimizes long-term damage to the environment and a farmers' wallet.

There are 3 main methods of pest controls:

- Mechanical/physical (cutting, ploughing, pulling, trapping, flooding, etc.) - time consuming, possibly needing large or specialty equipment;
- Cultural (seed bed preparations, seeding of cover crops, crop rotations, early harvest, etc.) - time sensitive, require long-term planning, less additional inputs needed, etc.;
- Biological (beneficial insects or non-habitable plants) - time sensitive slow process, costly to implement, not ideal for total control, etc.;
- Chemical (pesticides, insecticides, herbicides, fungicides, etc.) – costly, total control, required time between pesticide application and when the crop can be harvested, technical and safely done application necessary, higher potential in unwanted environmental harm, etc.;

It's uncommon for farmers to use the same mode of control multiple times in a row. Rather if we watch closely we can see where many of these controls are being used throughout the year, and from farm to farm. And done very much so similarly to the way we control pests in our own gardens. Let's just think about that for a second.

Most likely our gardens have some weeds (unwanted plants). We know that weeds have several potentials: create a habitable environment or food source for harmful bugs or plant diseases; outgrow the vegetables and outcompete them in the nutrients they need to grow from the soil; sometimes create areas of drought; or they have the potential to be poisonous to other plants or produce off-flavors in our foods. It's important to find the best, safest, and least expensive tools for you and rotate them so the pest isn't able to grow a resistance to the tool. And like you, it's important for farmers to do the same.

Farmers must follow strict wait-times between pesticide applications and when a crop can be harvested from a food safety perspective, as regulated by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and Health Canada.

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Farmers put a lot of thought into their plans. They don't need to spray, it is just one of the many tools they use, and they only want to do as much control as they need to grow a safe and healthy crop. Preserving the land for future crops and future farmers (and saving money) of course is always on the mind!

Each month we'll dig into a new 'Why?' of agriculture. If you have an agricultural question you'd like me to dig into let me know at adelaney@rdcounty.ca

