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Prepared by Department of Agronomy, College of Agriculture and Home Economics, University of Kentucky

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WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE RED CLOVER THIS YEAR?

June 15, 1967

By W. C. Thompson and N. L. Taylor

Red clover looks sick in a lot of fields this year. "Why?" is one of the most often asked questions here in the department.

First, we must not overlook the effect of the early growth followed by the hard freezes in March. This unusual condition started a chain reaction that made the insects and diseases more important in reducing stands. The early start, followed by the freeze, caused unseasonable maturity or false dormancy. Thus, many stands stopped growing at 6" to 10" heights. Many stands were thinned and some killed by this freeze.

Where the first harvest has already been made, the second growth looks fine and is making a remarkable recovery.

Diseases Hit Red Clover

Northern anthracnose, whose symptoms are lesions on the stems and petioles, hit this year's crop. Anthracnose causes the leaves to turn brown on the outer edges and drop off as the stems wither.

The clover leaf weevil and the alfalfa weevil have also taken their toll. Chemical treatments are the same for this crop as for alfalfa. Few crops have been sprayed so far. It is doubtful that subsequent spray will be needed.

Spittlebug damage was more serious this year than in past years. Mowing and removing the herbage for hay or silage will usually control this insect, as it cannot survive the intrusion of sunlight and heat.

Black root rot is one of the most difficult diseases to identify. It is apparently associated with many legumes and is especially severe on red clover. This fungus thrives in areas of high acreage of tobacco and long history of clover and bluegrass. The chain reaction is especially rough this year when a history of the above has persisted.

Clover sickness, associated with black root rot, probably will be best controlled by rotation to new areas and avoiding areas which have been in tobacco for several years. Although definite evidence is lacking, it appears that red clover should not be grown on the same soil for more than 3 rotations (tobacco, small grain, clover—each is one rotation). If difficulty in obtaining or maintaining stands occurs, the next clover rotation should be in a different field, if possible. This procedure should help in the control of all organisms causing stand loss, whether they are the black root rot organisms, soil insects, nematodes, or other unknown agents.

What to do about the 1967 crop?

If the stand still persists but is not growing, mow the herbage and take it off for hay or silage. The new growth in fields where this has been done is growing rapidly and looks like a real good prospect for a second crop.

Many farmers are asking if this second crop will slobber cattle. The answer is "Yes, about one in three crops." Chances are stronger, however, that the need for feed is greater than the threat of slobbering. Another thought—this slobbering can be reduced by blending two or more kinds of hay. Grass and clovers mixtures also will less likely slobber than straight clover.

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