

Grower Summary

SF 012 (GSK229b)

Effects of herbicides on weed control and fruit quality in blackcurrant

Final 2012

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Project Number: SF 012 (GSK229b)

Project Title: Effects of herbicides on weed control and fruit quality in blackcurrant

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Further information

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GROWER SUMMARY

Headline

- Blackcurrant herbicides do not significantly affect yield or most fruit quality parameters.

Background and expected deliverables

The number of herbicides approved for use in blackcurrants has diminished in recent years due to the EU review and harmonization of crop protection products. The recent loss of dichlobenil (Casoron) has had a significant effect on weed control in UK blackcurrant plantations and there has been a resulting increase in broad-leaved and perennial weeds. Docks (*Rumex* spp.), creeping thistle (*Cirsium arvense*), couch grass (*Elymus repens*) and mallows (*Malva sylvestris* & *M. neglecta*) are becoming particularly prominent.

Their presence in blackcurrant plantations can not only compete with the crop for light, water and nutrients, they can impede machine harvesting and contaminate the harvested crop. There is also concern that the yield and quality of fruit can be affected both by high levels of weed infestation and conversely, the use of traditional herbicide treatments. Since fruit quality is crucial to the juice processing industry, it is important to understand the impact of perennial weeds and herbicides on fruit quality.

This project aimed to provide clear information and a better understanding of how perennial weeds affect blackcurrant fruit yields and quality.

The objectives of the work were to:

1. Assess the impact of herbicide use on weed-infested plots on harvesting quality and fruit yield.
2. Correlate fruit quality factors, such as Vitamin C, sugars and organic acids with various treatments and an untreated crop.

Summary of the project and main conclusions

Herbicide treatments were tested for their ability to control weeds and their effect on fruit quality in well-established blackcurrant during 2012. The trial was conducted at East Adamston Farm, Muirhead, Angus, Scotland courtesy of Andrew Husband.

Seven-year-old blackcurrant cv. 'Ben Dorain' was used for the trial. Plots were 9 m long by 1 m wide, centered on a single row of blackcurrant bushes; two adjacent rows were used for the trial.

Herbicide combinations, napropamide (Devrinol) + pendimethalin (Stomp) or metribuzin + flufenacet (Artist), were applied as a directed spray to the soil on 13 March using an air-pressurized backpack sprayer. Because these herbicides do not have post-emergence activity on weeds, all plots, including non-treated control plots, had previously been treated with diquat on 1 March to remove emerged weed foliage.

Initial weed cover within three 50 by 50 cm quadrats/plot was estimated on 29 February prior to herbicide application and again on 4 April and 22 May, 1 and 2 months after treatment (MAT), respectively. Plots were then hand-weeded on 13 June and 4 July to minimize the effect of weed interference on berry production.

Plots were harvested using the grower's machine harvester on 2 August and berries from each plot were weighed in the field. Additionally, 50-ml berry samples were collected from each plot and frozen at -80 C until used for fruit quality analyses.

The experimental design was a randomized complete block with three replicates.

Full details of fruit quality sampling are included in the Science Section of this report.

Herbicide use

There were no significant differences in weed cover in the treatments prior to herbicide application (29 February evaluation).

- Two weed species were most numerous in the plots: common groundsel (*Senecio vulgaris*, annual) and willowherb (a compilation of several *Epilobium* species, both

annual and perennial, and *Chamerion angustifolium*, a perennial). These species accounted for 75 to 84% of all species recorded in the plots at the February evaluation.

- Artist and Stomp + Devrinol mix reduced weed cover by 75 and 35%, respectively, by 3 weeks after treatment (WAT, 4 April evaluation). At that time, both products were controlling 93% of common groundsel seedlings, but there was no influence on willow-herb.
- By 10 WAT (May evaluation), Stomp + Devrinol mix was still providing 69% common groundsel control, but control with Artist was similar to the untreated control.
- Willow-herb control at 10 WAT with Stomp + Devrinol mix and Artist was 80 and 87%, respectively; these products were controlling primarily seedling willow-herb plants of the annual *Epilobium* species, not the perennial *Chamerion* species.
- Herbicide treatment did not significantly affect total weed cover at 10 WAT, although total weed density was reduced from 45 to 68% by these herbicides.
- Herbicide treatments did not affect berry yield in this trial, although there was a trend toward lower yield in treated plots. This may indicate a degree of herbicide phytotoxicity to blackcurrant, or simply be due to differences in vigour of the tested bushes prior to herbicide application.

Data on herbicide use and effects is listed in Tables 1 and 2 of the Science Section of this report.

Fruit quality parameters

Most fruit quality parameters were not significantly affected by herbicide treatment in this trial. The only statistically significant effect was an increase in total sugar content of fruit from blackcurrant treated with Stomp + Devrinol mix compared with fruit from non-treated bushes or those treated with Artist. All measured sugars (glucose, fructose, and sucrose) displayed a similar pattern (data not shown).

Although not statistically significant, other trends in the fruit quality data included a tendency toward higher polyphenol content, lower anthocyanin content, fewer organic acids, and greater vitamin C content in non-treated blackcurrant; fruit also tended to be fewer and larger on non-treated bushes. Despite the tendency toward lower yield in Artist-treated plots, juice yield was numerically highest from those fruit. There was no clear relationship between herbicide treatment and juice °Brix or pH.

Data on the effect of herbicide use on fruit quality parameters are listed in Table 2 of the Science Section of this report.

Main conclusions

- Stomp + Devrinol mix and Artist provided at least 10 weeks pre-emergence control of common groundsel and willowherb species.
- Herbicides did not significantly affect yield or most fruit quality parameters, although total sugar was increased by treatment with Stomp + Devrinol mix.

Financial benefits

Given the results of this one-year project, it is difficult to calculate the exact financial benefits of weed control in blackcurrant plantations. However, given that plantation establishment costs amount to £4,000 per hectare and plantations can take up to three years to reach full production, any delay in reaching full production, which might be caused by weed competition, will result in lost revenue in the early life of a plantation and increase the time taken to pay off the establishment costs. This work has also demonstrated that herbicides did not significantly affect yield or most fruit quality parameters.

Actions points for growers

- No action points for growers have arisen from this project.