Just like barnyardgrass and other yield-robbing weeds, glyphosate resistant Palmer Amaranth has exploded into a major concern among growers in recent years. In fact, Palmer Amaranth, more commonly known as pigweed, is now considered to be one of the most bothersome weeds in Mid-South crop production. Season after season of treating soybean and corn crops with the same herbicide means that pigweed has inevitably outsmarted the long-trusted chemicals meant to control them. Now farmers must take a more proactive role when managing pigweed in their fields.

According to University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service Weed Scientist Dr. Bob Scott, there are several ways growers can combat their pigweed problem, including adding rice production to their rotation.

“Fields that have rice in the rotation tend to be the cleaner fields. Part of the reason for that is pigweed can’t tolerate a flood,” Scott said.

However, that does not mean growers can ignore pigweed in their rice fields or the pigweed that sprouts up on the levees. Gaining control early on is vital because pigweed is a very fast growing weed, and it can get out of hand very quickly.

As rice growers start making decisions for the 2013 growing season, they may want to take into account implications that the 2012 Farm Bill could have on their operations. In Washington, D.C., lawmakers are busy hashing out the parameters of the new Farm Bill. The new bill could create a few big changes for the rice industry.

The USA Rice Federation has been working closely with its farm policy task force representing growers in all six major rice growing states, to ensure that the best policies possible are put forth for rice growers. “At USA Rice, we want to be the voice for our growers and get the best policy put in place for them,” said Reece Langley, vice president for government affairs at the USA Rice Federation. “We also want to serve as a resource for our growers if they have questions or concerns.”

One of the biggest changes that could profoundly affect growers is the movement away from direct payments — these payments have been in place since 1996 and have served as a safety net for rice producers. This change will have a significant effect on the way growers and lenders determine financing. “With direct payment going away, the industry really had to focus intently on what would be an appropriate policy to replace it,” said Langley.

Due to this substantial change, the rice industry has collaborated with growers, economists and the agriculture committees in Congress to come up with a solution that would allow for producers to still be profitable. “The rice industry is seeking an option that would allow either a revenue-based safety net or a price-based
to control pigweed prior to flooding, growers need to be making decisions about their herbicide management program.

“Sometimes fields have to be treated with herbicides prior to going to flood if the pigweed is just so bad that it’s affecting early season rice development. The biggest mistake a grower can make is letting it get too big; application timing is critical,” said Scott. “One of the best tools we have for controlling pigweed is Aims® and propamidone.”

Aims® EC herbicide, a product of FMC Corporation, is a fast-acting, non-residual herbicide that tackles the toughest broadleaf weeds such as seedling groundcherry, smartweed, morningglory, hemp sesbania, pigweed, velvetleaf and waterhemp. It is formulated as a low use rate, easily tank-mixed liquid. More information on Aims® EC herbicide can be found online at www.FMCCrop.com.

Curtailing the rise of pigweed requires more than just crop rotation and herbicide application. Growers should also take care to proactively manage the spread of pigweed seeds—which can number in the thousands per single plant. Controlling pigweed prior to seeding can go a long way towards reducing pigweed populations. All growers need to be proactive in controlling the spread of pigweed.

“That’s exactly how our pigweed problem exploded in 2000 and 2001,” Scott said. “It wasn’t the natural spread of the weed—it was probably in the harvest equipment. Some very proactive farmers are taking the extra step to clean out a combine before they go from a pigweed-infested field into any clean field.”

Taking a proactive approach to managing pigweed is vital. All growers need to be thinking about what they can do to help eliminate those weeds that have plagued the South for the past couple of years. “Making timely weed management decisions is only going to help increase our yield potential,” Scott said.

It wasn’t the natural spread of the weed—it was probably in the harvest equipment.

### Herbicide Development and Best Practices Help Rice Growers Throughout Season

Rice growers have options. Over the past decade, the rice industry has had the luxury of boring in on weed control and developing new products and best practices to address specific challenges in crop production. And over the past few years, several new products have been labeled for rice, providing growers with solutions for most every weed control problem out there.

According to Louisiana State University Weed Science Professor Dr. Eric Webster, the rice industry has had many advantages in herbicide development over other crops, such as beans, cotton and corn.

“There are quite a few crops that have focused on glyphosate-resistance issues, but with rice it’s a little different,” said Dr. Webster. “There are not many weaknesses from a herbicide standpoint in rice production today. We have an answer for just about every needed solution. That’s due to continual research and ongoing development.”

As the rice industry continues to focus on herbicide development, it also places great emphasis on educating growers on best practices in weed control. Dr. Webster feels that growers are beginning to realize how important it is to get herbicide applications out early.

“It’s important to apply herbicides early—either as a pre or an early post,” said Dr. Webster.

Addressing weed problems early will lessen what you have to do later in the year.

Weed management best practices and application recommendations will vary per region and weed/grass issue(s)—some regions are battling barnyardgrass while others take on pigweed, among others. Many weed issues come down to getting out there early before it becomes a situation that’s out of hand. Applying a herbicide early on conventional or Clearfield® rice, such as Command® 3ME by FMC, can help control weeds and grasses early. Command herbicide holds back weed pressure early for a clean seedbed and goes on protecting tender rice seedlings in those first critical weeks of stand establishment.

“We saw excellent weed control this year because growers got out there and applied herbicides in a timely manner,” said Dr. Webster.

“We need to know what issues they have in their fields and address those issues first when choosing a herbicide,” said Dr. Webster. “Growers should also keep thinking about their rotation and what they are putting in the ground next year. Being up front and proactive is going to save a lot of headaches later on.”

### Farm Bill Will Affect Rice Growers (Continued)

safety net,” said Langley. “Having strong price and revenue protection is a critical component of a safety net going forward for growers.”

Another area of the bill the rice industry is intently focusing on is Supplemental Conservation Options (SCO), which is an optional crop insurance policy that growers can purchase. “It’s a county-based policy that would provide up to a 90% revenue guarantee, and has a relatively low premium cost per acre,” said Langley.

In addition to SCO, USA Rice has played an instrumental role in developing two new crop insurance policies and including language in the House version of the bill to help improve the opportunity to get these policies approved and implemented—a margin protection policy and an add-on to existing crop insurance. The margin protection policy is designed to help protect against rising input costs throughout the growing season, focusing primarily on fuel and fertilizer costs. This policy would help to prevent the decline in a grower’s margin. The add-on component is designed to provide a per-acre payment to help offset some of the cost of harvesting rice that is lying on the ground (drowned rice) due to hurricanes or heavy rains/wind.

One more area of the bill that is of interest to rice growers is the maintenance of strong conservation programs. “Rice growers are interested in, and are strong participants of, conservation programs that help to conserve soil, water and maintain the wetland environment for wildlife and other species,” said Langley.

All of these policy changes could have a profound effect on the rice industry and the way growers go about producing rice for the ever-growing population. The U.S. rice industry produces positive impacts on our nation’s balance of trade, economy and jobs, healthy diets and conservation—particularly of migratory bird habitat preservation. “It is our hope that by the end of this year the final Farm Bill will pass and include the best policies to help our industry remain successful and viable as we move forward,” said Langley.