

Managing Flax Straw



Preparing for Harvest

Flax ripens from the top-down, beginning with the oldest (central) bolls. As the crop reaches full maturity, seeds formed in the bolls begin to lose moisture, and contain approximately 30% moisture at the 75% brown boll stage (Figure 1). When 75% of the bolls across the field are in the brown boll stage, swathing or a pre-harvest desiccant may be done to aid in crop threshing and uniformity for harvest.

Figure 1: Brown-seeded flax boll and seed colour change



Image courtesy of M. Beath, SaskFlax

Uniformity of a flax crop is important for improving ease of crop material flow through the combine and separating seed from bolls. Make sure header knives are sharp and in good condition, as well as straw chopper knives for proper residue management. If dropping and baling straw, consider removing secondary chopper knives to reduce machine load and keep straw length.

Registered Crop Desiccants on Flax

Using a pre-harvest aid can help dry down flax stems, bolls, and weeds for easier threshing, higher quality straw, and a more timely harvest. Three herbicides are registered for safe use as a pre-harvest aid on flax (Table 1). Always check the product label and the Guide to Crop Protection for application rate information.

Contact your flax buyer to ensure that they will accept flax seed or straw treated with some or any of these products prior to making a pre-harvest aid decision. Maximum residue limits (MRL) vary by buyer and end-use or export market.

Table 1: Registered Pre-Harvest Aid Products on Flax

Herbicide	Trade Name	Crop Stage	Pre-Harvest Interval	Comments
Diquat	Reglone Ion, Desica, Bolster II, Stage, etc.	75% brown boll	None listed	No MRL for USA, China, CODEX
Glyphosate	multiple	<30% grain moisture (75-80% brown boll)	None listed, 7-14 days for effect.	Do not apply if intended for seed
Saflufenacil	Heat WDG, Heat LQ	75% brown boll	3 days	Not approved for export to the EU

Straw Management Options

Recent closures of flax straw processing facilities in Manitoba mean that flax growers will not have access to the traditional market for flax residue. To manage flax straw, there are a number of options:

- Windrow and bale straw
 - biofuels, animal bedding/shelter, and septic tank, garden/nursery plant insulation are in demand
 - smaller bales are more widely accepted in smaller markets, consider 2x3 squares
- Windrow and push into piles for burning.
- Cut flax higher when swathing/direct harvesting, leaving taller straw standing to trap snow
- Harvest using a stripper header, leaving more standing residue, similar to above
- Harvest, chop, and spread straw, followed by one or more options below:
 - leave to ret (decompose) on the soil surface
 - incorporate with tillage; and/or
 - harrow into windrows for burning
- Cut straw and spread using a forage harvester
- Land roll chopped residue and stubble down onto soil surface, to promote natural retting and use a minimum- or zero-till seeding pass next year

Crop Residue Burning Program Permits

Burning flax residues may be necessary in some cases, but other methods of management are encouraged to retain organic matter and nutrients. Crop residue burn permits are issued by Manitoba Agriculture by calling 1-800-265-1233. Visit www.gov.mb.ca/agriculture/crops/crop-residue-burning-program/index.html for more information.

Contact Us

For more information, contact Manitoba Agriculture

- Online www.manitoba.ca/agriculture
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- Phone 1-844-769-6224