Where farmers let johnsongrass compete in the row, yield reduction can literally halve the crop. You've got to do something long term because johnsongrass just won't go away,” says a soybean expert.

A flush of heavy rainfall across the south this spring with high humidity and soil temperatures, may be responsible. This made weed invasion farmers have witnessed in some time.

All spring and summer extended rains fell on middle south and southern Missouri. A 30 percent increase over last season for some areas - resulted in record weed levels, with farmers unable to get cultivating equipment into fields because of wet conditions.

In May, Louisiana had about 20 days of rainfall, which meant every second or third day farmers couldn’t get into fields either to plant or harvest winter wheat.

Problems Similar to what delta states faced identical weather patterns, although heavy rains were often localized. Within a two-day period, southeast Missouri counties had 10 inches of rain and flooded fields. Northeast Arkansas farmers rented third of their soybeans, after a wet May and early June left standing water in many fields.

Even though grasses and broadleaf weeds appear to have a head start, farmers can still halt their spread with available postemergence herbicides, experts say.

To control the widespread weed, johnsongrass, scientists at U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Southern Weed Science Laboratory suggest using spot treatments for small populations or over-the-top herbicide sprays if johnsongrass threatens yields. Many farmers mix both broadleaf and grass herbicides together as a fuel saving measure.

Economic Pest As an economic pest, johnsongrass is in a class by itself, pushed into the top five worst weed category by better overall weed control and preplant herbicides in what scientists call an ecological shift. That’s where one weed gains dominance over weaker species.

Dr. Chester McWhorter, chief scientist at USDA’s Stoneville, Miss., weed research facility claims an increase in rhizome and seeding johnsongrass could affect one out of every three soybean fields.

The reason johnsongrass has been such a problem is its persistence, McWhorter points out. “Even the most conscientious effort year after year can be set back by only one bad season. Also, a proliferation of moisture this year will germinate dormant seeds left in the soil by last season’s drought and herbicide failures.”

A recent National Soybean Crop Improvement Council survey showed over half of U.S. soybean growers aren’t satisfied with their weed control methods, despite an arsenal of herbicides. Any gains by harder weed species like johnsongrass comes as bad news for farmers.

Yields Hurt “If johnsongrass is thick in soybeans, yields drop rapidly,” says Ruel Nestor, Arkansas Extension soybean specialist. Little Rock. Nestor adds, “Where farmers let johnsongrass compete in the row, yield reduction can literally half the crop. You’ve got to do something long term because johnsongrass just won’t go away.”

Early season suppression — in the first three or four weeks after johnsongrass emerges — is the most crucial time for preventing yield losses.

In a year where farmers have not been flooded out or suffered excessively dry weather, over-the-top herbicides do a good job of keeping weeds at manageable levels.