

As far as seeding rates are concerned, 80% of the growers planted between 135 and 180 pounds of seed per acre, and the remainder indicated seeding rates between 24 and 28 seeds per sq. ft.

What We've Learned This Season:

1. Fertilizing Wheat...At planting, 15-30 units of nitrogen seems to be sufficient to get wheat off to a good start and provide enough tillers to set the stage for good yields later. This rate is what research has indicated for a number of years now, and growers who do this I've noticed have better tiller counts (in January) than those who do not apply nitrogen at planting. The take home message is that: "15-30 #N at planting = more tillers = more potential seed heads." In addition, 100-130 total units of nitrogen on soils with good yield potential give better yielding wheat especially if nitrogen can be applied at growth stage 30. This is when the growing point of wheat is about a half and inch above the soil and wheat seems to have "stood up". Since nitrogen fertilizers have become so expensive, getting the most out of this nutrient is even more important than ever. In other words the proper amount of nitrogen is important, but applying at the right time is critical too.
2. Sulfur Is Needed...It looks like that in almost all cases, growers need to apply 20-25 pounds of sulfur per acre on sandy soils and monitor sulfur by using plant analysis on other soils. The sulfur should be added along with the recommended fertilizer. By fertilizing wheat, growers also are providing sufficient nutrients to the soybean crop which usually follows. Wheat following peanuts will probably have sufficient sulfur due to the application of land plaster. We mentioned the importance of nitrogen management and sufficient sulfur is necessary in the soil for the plant to be able to pick up nitrogen.
3. Insect pests on the rise?...I'm not entirely sure about that, but 2007-08 did have some huge populations of Cereal Leaf Beetle (CLB). Also, the Hessian fly showed up in areas where we're not used to seeing it. Long story told short...scout for the CLB in late March to mid-April. The threshold is 25 eggs or larvae per 100 tillers. We had many acres sprayed for CLB this year. For the Hessian fly, there are some varieties that have had resistance to Type-L and can help lessen the damage caused by this tiny insect. Of greater importance is planting wheat at the right time, or on the late end of the planting period, and most importantly, not planting wheat behind wheat. There are also some seed applied insecticide treatments that can be effective and when over-the-top treatments are necessary, several insecticides can work well too. As far as aphids are concerned, they are generally not worth spraying, even though they can get numerous in the field.
4. Wheat Diseases Worse? ... Well, we've certainly had a lot of wheat planted so there are more opportunities for disease to develop. Plus, weather was conducive to the development of powdery mildew. In the variety demonstration I mentioned above, you can see that susceptible varieties of wheat had more mildew and those varieties with resistance had less. So in choosing seed for next year, consider resistant varieties. If you are planting varieties with no resistance to powdery mildew, consider seed treatments at planting, or fungicide applications prior to flag leaf emergence. It might be worth mentioning that more soil-borne mosaic viruses, as well as spindle streak virus are showing up. So, there will be diseases that begin to affect wheat more in the future.
5. Head Scab?...This is a disease that has become more prevalent . It causes shriveling of the kernels (tombstones) and much lower yields. It is linked to no-till farming and especially no-till behind corn. The fungus that causes head scab, Fusarium is often found on corn residue and in periods of the spring where warm and wet weather coincides with wheat flowering, the disease can get more serious. Head scab is particularly worrisome in that mycotoxins can be found on infected heads, which greatly lowers the quality of affected grain for human or livestock consumption. Consider planting wheat behind corn conventionally, or plant varieties that are resistant to head scab. There are no effective fungicides. Use high quality seed treated with a fungicide or combination of fungicides.