

WHEAT 2010

Column written by Extension Educator Paul Hay

Wheat is an opportunity crop. This column will look at key management decisions for the wheat crop this year and opportunities for the future.

Wheat has some advantages which should be noted. The crop is harvested in the summer. The income is very handy to reduce operating cost loans for the fall corn and soybean crops. Wheat produces nearly the same bushels when no-tilled behind soybeans, corn or on second year wheat or retiring alfalfa acres. Wheat stubble fields kept clean and no-tilled to corn give a significant yield advantage of 25-28 bushels per acre when compared to other planting options. Having wheat on one-third or one-fifth of your dryland acres is a positive help for stabilizing dryland corn yields. Wheat also serves to help us diversify our crops and the weeds and diseases which affect them. Wheat provides a good cover of fine residue which helps maintain a quality no-till cover in the field, which is hard to achieve with just corn and soybeans.

When planting wheat there is a risk of wheat streak mosaic virus doing considerable damage to the crop if green volunteer wheat is present in the field or in fields adjacent to the newly planted wheat. Stunting caused by wheat streak mosaic will reduce yields from 25 to 60 percent. When spraying volunteer with glyphosate and or atrazine the treatment needs to be done three weeks ahead of wheat planting time to make sure there is a 10 day to two week brown period. This kills off the wheat curl mite which carries the wheat streak virus to the wheat crop. This has been a disease on the increase in Southeast Nebraska in recent years.

We have reduced, but not eliminated discounted value because of common bunt or stinking smut in Southeast Nebraska. All wheat seed from all sources should be treated this fall with fungicides labeled to prevent smut. If this is done it will prevent producers from a number of seedling disease problems as well as prevent the smut.

Wheat needs to be planted in late September or during the month of October into firm seedbeds like those of no-till fields. If the seedbed is worked for some reason, make sure it is firmed back up by rain and or harrowing operations. Plant at one and one-half inches deep. Check planting depth in every field, our large equipment and multiple farms today can have very different seedbed conditions in field a few miles apart. Shallow planted wheat is much more likely to be affected by winter injury and root and crown rot infections. Starter fertilizer for a quick fall start along with recommended levels of phosphorus and nitrogen fertilizer will help achieve top production.

Recommended wheat varieties for 2010 would include Overland, Hallam, Millennium, Wahoo, PostRock, Santa Fe, Armour, and Art. These are varieties with a good yield record in University of Nebraska trials and which have a disease, maturity and hardiness package acceptable in Southeast Nebraska. Planting treated certified seed is the best option. If wheat seed is kept over make sure it is cleaned and treated ahead of planting.