



.....STRAIGHT FROM THE HORSES MOUTH

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There is so much that we could discuss this week with everything that is coming down the pike with the barrage of regulations hitting just before Memorial Day and then this week's announcement of the WOTUS ruling. I think however we need to take a good look at our area wheat fields and I don't mean a windshield tour. Because if you used that management tool, you may be in some trouble. Let us this week take a look at what I mean.

While this rain is absolutely welcome, and has really helped our grass in pastures, corn and beans that are trying to get a start and even the lawns out there that have been just as dry we are also seeing some adverse effects. If you drive by most any wheat field you can't help but notice that it has a weird color to it, much too early for turning in its natural form. But if you walk through the wheat you will notice that Stripe rust has exploded in in the past 3-7 days in this part of the State due to that rain and cooler weather. We had reports earlier, but those were spotty and were for the most part on more susceptible varieties. Now we are talking pretty much carte blanche in most fields across South Central Nebraska.

Dr. Stephen Wegulo, Nebraska Extension Plant Pathologist, made a trip out our way this week and looked at wheat fields in southern Nebraska along the Highway 4 corridor (about 20 miles north of the Kansas border) from southeast to southwest. He indicated that the incidence of stripe rust was 100% in all fields that were not sprayed and severity was very high in fields with susceptible varieties (>75% and close to 100% in a couple of fields that he looked at - that is, the entire foliage in the whole field, not just some leaves). He also indicated that the growth stage ranged from flowering to beginning of ripening. According to Dr. Wegulo, many fields looked spectacularly yellow due to stripe rust. I will second that observation as it is what I am seeing and what farmers all across the region are reporting. If you walk through the fields your shoes/boots turn a pretty orange color – or not so pretty if you are the owner of the wheat field. Unfortunately for the wheat, weather conditions continue to be favorable to the disease. Other diseases were completely overshadowed by stripe rust. Dr. Wegulo did see one head with Fusarium head blight in a state variety trial in the southeast. I am expecting to see much more here.

What are my Options? I first suggest reading more from Dr. Wegulo at <http://cropwatch.unl.edu/> as there is some very good information there. I also thought Jenny Reese, Clay Co. Extension Educator had some good advice for our producers. “We've been warning about stripe rust and scab for several weeks, yet there are many fields that are just heading and/or flowering right now while others are in soft-dough. Wheat is at such a variety of stages in the area. Rain has also increased our risk for Fusarium Head Blight (head scab). Here are some ideas that you may want to consider. 1) Do nothing and see what you get. If your wheat is past flowering, fungicide application is not an option as all fungicides would be off-label. 2) If your wheat is headed and beginning to flower, you could still consider a fungicide application of Caramba or Prosaro. Both are labeled for headed and flowering wheat. There's a 30 day pre-harvest restriction for both. Rainfast varies from ¼ hour to 2 hours or when dry depending on environmental conditions. Both fungicides can help prevent scab and control rust on the plant. However, research has shown that best scab prevention occurs when wheat is headed and 30% of the plants are in the beginning flower stage. Application within 5 days of these criteria still showed positive results. Research showed that application before or after this time period greatly reduced effectiveness of preventing scab. And - 3) Consider haying it.”

Bale the Wheat: The third suggestion really hit a note with me as I was particularly interested in one area farmer's question of – “With this late stage and severity of the rust, can I put this down with a windrower and bale it for cow hay?” I had my thoughts on that, but decided to see what others thought. Dr. Bruce Anderson, Extension Forage Specialist also was part of the discussion on this and dedicated a part of his “Hay & Forage Minutes for June 1 through 5” to this very topic of haying the infected wheat. He has shared the following: “Wheat fields are turning yellow prematurely across southern Nebraska and into adjoining areas. According to plant pathologists, stripe rust is the culprit. Now what can you do?”

“Stripe rust can be a devastating disease on wheat and other cereals. It can become widespread on susceptible varieties that have not been sprayed with appropriate fungicides during prolonged periods of wet weather like we have experienced lately. When the upper most leaf, the flag leaf, becomes heavily infected, grain yield losses can exceed 30 percent. Sometimes adequate grain production may not be feasible. So other options need to be considered.

Baling hay or chopping silage are two potential options. Rust pustules are not toxic to cattle although sometimes the spores can irritate respiration. It can be difficult to make good silage, though. Rusty leaves dry out rapidly so it can be hard to get the best moisture content for silage packing and fermentation. Usually it is best to harvest rusty wheat hay just before heading to retain reasonable forage quality. As plants mature further, quality can decline rapidly. Digestibility of rust affected cells is much lower than that of normal cells. Fortunately, protein doesn't seem to be affected greatly. Properly made hay should not deteriorate in the bale due to the rust any more than normal.

Be sure to have the forage tested before feeding. It is likely that nutrient concentration will differ from typical wheat hay so testing will help in developing rations. Also consider the impact of removing the wheat residue. Adequate residue helps retain soil moisture, boosting yield of your next crop. There never are good choices when problems like this develop. All you can do is weigh your options and chose what is best for you.” There certainly may be hope for feed at least! Good Luck!

The preceding information comes from the research and personal observations of the writer which may or may not reflect the views of UNL or Nebraska Extension. For more further information on these or other topics contact D. A. Lienemann, Nebraska Extension Educator for Webster County in Red Cloud, (402) 746-3417 or email to: dlienemann2@unl.edu or go to the website at: <http://www.webster.unl.edu/home>