Harvesting of soybeans and corn is proceeding in southeast Nebraska and it is early October. While the Hessian fly free date has passed and we are past the ideal planting date when maximum yield can be expected, it’s not too late to plant wheat and expect good yields. On Friday, October 4th cash wheat prices were around $7.20- $7.30 in Eastern Nebraska and $7.30 - $7.50 in Kansas City. With the potential for excellent yields of 70-80 bushels per acre or higher, wheat can be a very profitable crop with lower inputs than corn and less water required for the crop. Wheat is a good crop in the rotation as it will help clean up weed problems, provide an opportunity for conservation work in fields and even plant a second or double crop, i.e. soybeans or sunflowers, a forage or cover crop following the wheat harvest.

Wheat yields in 2013 were excellent in many areas of Nebraska, despite lower than normal rainfall conditions. Overland and Wesley are public wheat varieties that have been planted for several years and still produce excellent yields in the variety tests across Nebraska. A couple of new commercial varieties that are being planted in the area include Armour and SY Wolf. Everest is a Kansas variety that is also being planted in the region. Whatever variety you plant it is important to select a variety that has performed well in the region the past several years and has good disease resistance. Be prepared to possibly apply fungicides in the spring if the environment is favorable for diseases next spring. Information on wheat variety yields, characteristics and sources of seed can be accessed on-line at: http://cropwatch.unl.edu/web/cropwatch/archive?articleID=5385534.

It is important to manage wheat as you would manage corn or soybeans. Advances in wheat breeding and disease resistance have improved the yield potential of wheat to 100 bushels per acre or more. Some of the wheat yields in the variety trials this year were 90-100 bushels per acre. Under good growing conditions and intensive management we can expect wheat yields 75 – 90 bushels per acre or higher. Wheat will respond to fertility and also intensive management. Seeding rates have increased because most new varieties do not tiller or stool as in the past. Recommended seeding rate is 120 pounds per acre for irrigated or intensely managed wheat production systems, with 90 pounds per acre the most common seeding rate for dryland. Some growers under dryland conditions have been experimenting planting at higher rates (100 – 120 pounds per acre) and have had good success.

Wheat should be planted in a firm weed-free seedbed. No-tilling wheat works very well, especially after soybeans. We have had some good rains recently, so soil conditions are favorable for germination and good stand establishment. It is critical to control weeds so wheat can get off to a good start with little competition. Fertility is also important in wheat production. A producer told me wheat yields were 15 bu/ac higher in a field where he applied phosphorus compared to where no phosphorus was applied. While all soils may not need phosphorus, it is important to soil test and determine fertility
requirements for your wheat crop. A fall application of nitrogen is also beneficial in getting wheat off to a good start. If soils are deficient in nutrients such as phosphorus, wheat will respond positively to applications. Sandy soils are many times low in potassium, and crops will respond to applications. By following some of these guidelines you have the potential for a good wheat crop.

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