

WHAT ABOUT THE WHEAT?

While there isn't a lot of wheat grown in the region, there is still some. Wheat is grown on fields where farmers are interested in completing conservation work in summer and fall. Cattle producers will grow wheat prior to planting alfalfa in August or a forage/cover crop for grazing in late summer. Some farmers also use wheat as part of their rotation, especially when they have hard to control weeds on their farm. The question this year is, "Did it survive the cold winter?" In early March there was concern due to the lack of precipitation all winter, little snow cover for protection and very cold temperatures with strong winds. Now many of the fields appear to have survived the winter in relatively good condition. I am sure there are a few fields that have some areas of winter-kill, especially on slopes that were exposed to the wind.

As far as the wheat crop, we are not out of the woods yet. We need some rain to replenish the soil. One good thing about wheat, it generally does better when we do not have so much rain. Too much rain and wet conditions will encourage disease development. It is important to be timely in fertilization, weed control and fungicide application if you have problems with disease.

If you did not apply nitrogen fertilizer last fall or only a limited amount, it is beneficial to apply fertilizer early to get the most benefit. If your field wasn't sampled for residual nitrogen prior to planting wheat, ideally sampling the field for nitrogen this spring would provide an answer to this question. Wheat will usually benefit from nitrogen applications up to boot stage of development. Earlier applications of nitrogen fertilizer are especially beneficial to later planted wheat or wheat that hasn't previously received nitrogen fertilizer, as they help plant stands thicken up by increasing growth and tillering. This is also beneficial for weed control, as a good, thick stand of wheat will reduce competition from weeds. How much nitrogen is recommended for wheat in our area? A minimum of 100 pounds of nitrogen per acre is recommended, including any residual available nitrogen in the soil. If possible apply nitrogen before the wheat has jointed for maximum benefit.

Weed control is another management practice that is key to successful wheat production. The next 2-3 weeks is a good time to check your wheat fields and determine if you have any weed infestations. Usually the winter annuals cause the most problems in wheat and can really reduce wheat yields if left untreated. Some common weeds that you may have include: pennycress, henbit, chickweed, maretail, kochia, wild buckwheat and different types of mustards. Hopefully you have kept track of weed problems in previous years and can check these areas. You may be able to successfully treat weed problems by just spot spraying certain parts of a field if you just have a small area that has an infestation. There are several herbicides that do an excellent job of controlling weeds in wheat. Costs are quite variable and some are not recommended for use with liquid fertilizers, such as dicamba. Others can be used with fertilizer solutions, but may not need a surfactant. Growth regulator herbicides, such as 2, 4-D and dicamba (Banvel) are recommended for use after the wheat is well tillered, but before the joint stage. Applications before or after these wheat growth stages could cause crop injury and

reduce wheat yields significantly. The bottom line is to always read and follow the label directions on the herbicide.

What about fungicides to reduce diseases in your wheat? With the potential of getting a good yield and price for your wheat crop, the use of a fungicide may be beneficial. It is important to pay attention to the label and know the PHI (Pre-harvest Interval). You do not want to apply a fungicide late and then have to wait to harvest your wheat crop because your PHI has not been reached. Remember each year is different and if conditions are not favorable for disease development, treatment with a fungicide may not be profitable. If you have questions, contact me at 402-274-4755.

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