

Air Seeded Rice Bypasses Weather Problems

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Water seeding rice has been a regular method of planting for Peter Rost Jr. of New Madrid, Mo. for the last six or seven years.

"It's something we do when we have to," he said. "We don't necessarily plan on doing it, but we have a lot of zero grade rice fields and some years they don't dry up. So if we want rice we're usually forced to water seed. We also have some overflow ground that the river gets in and backs in there and if we want rice we have to waterseed. "We've had good luck with it, it works, and it's a good practice."

When using RiceTec seed Rost will use the same amount as if it were drill seeded. However when using conventional varieties they use

off. It gives you a little head start, probably three or four days, maybe a week. It's sprouted and it's falling into water and hitting the mud with a sprout already there."

Malone, who operates as Ag Air, Inc., has been a friend with Rost for years.

"My service is basically a 911 service," he explained. "Farmers don't call me until they have to, and I don't blame them, because it is more expensive. These airplanes are very expensive and they're expensive to operate. So it costs them more to get it done with an airplane but it works fairly well."

Malone is probably one of the few left that still soak the seed before flying it on the field.

"It's just time consuming and you do it for such a short period of time during the year that you have to have a lot of extra equipment that you use for only two weeks," he said. "A lot of

Water seeding rice has been a regular method of planting rice for Peter Rost Jr. (left) shown with Peter Malone, the pilot who operates Ag Air, Inc.

Photo by John LaRose, Jr.



three bushel water seeded to two bushel drilled. There is no yield difference.

The cost is a little more with an airplane, but when wet weather prevails the Rosts have no choice.

"If we want a rice crop we have to fly it in," he said. "It takes about 20 to 30 minutes to fly it in versus a couple of hours drilling it so it's very fast."

Rost estimated it could amount about a 50 percent savings when it comes to time.

"The airplane did 300 acres in an hour where it would take me probably a day and a half to get 300 acres, so if there's a rain coming it's definitely a lot more efficient," Rost said.

Rain doesn't stop an airplane. They also try to time the flight when there is no wind.

"We soak the rice before we seed it," Rost said.

The pilot, Peter Malone, has some tanks and he soaks the seed for 48 hours; then he'll pull the water for 24 hours, and after that it's ready to be dropped.

"That way it sprouts that seed and that speeds up germination," Rost said. "When it hits the water it already has a sprout on it and it'll take

people have just gotten out of the habit of soaking."

Besides rice, Malone has also flown it soybeans and wheat. The wet season this year has kept him busier than normal.

"Yea, I've done more waterseeding than I typically do," he agreed. "It got late in the year and farmers started getting a little nervous about getting a crop in, so I'm flying quite a bit more. We sow rice dry also, by the way. It'll sprout in water that way too, but it speeds it up if you sprout it first."

Rost recalls one time when the fields were flooded with the river and he had the field seeded by air.

"We were actually out there in a Johnboat while they were flying the rice in, and the water was maybe six foot deep," he said. "We're sitting out there in a boat watching. And last year we were out in the boat, in fact we were marking the field borders for the pilot so he could fly it in." △

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