

Check The Weather

Fungicides For Rust May Or May Not Pay, Depending On Conditions



Dr. Jason Kelley, Arkansas Wheat and Feed Grains Extension Agronomist, says "If you don't have foliar disease you're not likely to get a yield increase benefit from fungicides."

Photo by John LaRose

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The weather forecast may be the best indicator of whether there will be a benefit to applying foliar fungicides to corn for controlling southern rust or other foliar diseases. That's the recommendation of Dr. Jason Kelley, Arkansas wheat and feed grains extension agronomist, stationed at Little Rock.

"If you don't have foliar disease you're not likely to get a yield increase benefit from the fungicides," he said.

That statement comes from research conducted since 2005. Problems developed in 2004 with foliar diseases such as southern rust and leaf blights after a particularly wet summer. Last year there wasn't much threat since it was so dry and hot. The disease developed and then just sat there and didn't do anything due to dry weather.

"Last year I would estimate at least half of our irrigated corn was sprayed with fungicide and there's a lot of information out there that says if you put a fungicide on you will more than get a benefit in a greater yield," Kelley said. "What we have seen in our trials the last couple of years is if you don't have disease you are not going to get a yield increase."

Last year there was a lot of good high dollar corn that was booked so producers were a lot more willing to spend some money on the crop.

"I think in some instances it may be a relatively cheap insurance to protect the crop," he continued. "If you have 200 bushel corn, at say \$4 a bushel, that is \$800/acre. Adding a \$15 fungicide treatment in the big picture really isn't that much. So a lot of the crop was sprayed. Now was there any benefit this year?"

Probably in some fields. Up here in northeast Arkansas we just didn't get a whole lot of rain and foliar diseases didn't flourish. Down in southern Arkansas they got quite a bit of rain there in July."

The big problem is if you wait until the disease develops its too late in most cases. Many of the fungicide treatments are put out at tassel to silking time.

"Some foliar diseases in some years may already be developing by silking," Kelley said. "But other times, they may develop later in the growing season. From silking to maturity you have a seven to eight week window when foliar disease can impact corn yield and stalk quality, and that is a long time.

"That is the issue: When it gets time to put fungicides out you really have to look at the weather," he continued. "If hot and dry weather is forecasted for the next couple of weeks, in reality, there may not be a benefit. However, if it looks like it is going to set in raining for a couple of weeks, the application may pay for itself. It's just is a decision you have to make."

He said farmers really have to look at their yield goal. If there's the potential for 200 bushel corn, protecting that may be worth it. On dry land corn it probably is not worth it.

"In south Arkansas this year there were a few fields that, from top to bottom, were orange with the southern rust," he said. "Often times southern rust comes in late enough that the actual direct hit on the yield is really not that great. The main concern is lodging. If you shut that plant down prematurely, it dries down and then you are more predisposed to have lodging problems, and lodging is the big issue. Δ