

With Precision Management

Farmers Can Increase Wheat Yields

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Growing high yield wheat in Illinois was addressed recently by Dr. Steve Ebelhar, University of Illinois Agronomist with the Dixon Springs Research Center.

“The world record wheat yield is 232 bushels grown in New Zealand,” he said. “While growing conditions in New Zealand do not parallel the conditions in Illinois, farmers here can still shoot for a high yield anyway. There are some problems with Illinois soil and climate conditions, but it’s still a pretty good area to grow wheat.”

Ebelhar discussed a research program conducted in Illinois the last few years with a focus on high yield management. He presented data from the variety trials showing that location, the environment and variety selection all significantly affect yield. But, some locations had good yields in one year and in other years the yields were not so good due to the interaction of location, weather and variety.

“It’s going to be pretty difficult to predict where your record yields are going to be in any given year,” Ebelhar said. “However, we evaluated a set of treatments that we thought would improve yields in Illinois, including foliar insecticides, foliar fungicides at two different times in the spring, and managing nitrogen with split applications, inhibitors and even increasing the nitrogen rate a little above our current recommended rate. Basically our results show that, from an economical standpoint, you probably can’t afford to ‘do everything’ without having a good reason to do it. In other words, you’re not going to use an insecticide unless you have an insect problem that needs to be corrected.”

The same goes for fungicides. If you have a year when there’s not a lot of disease pressure, the fungicides are not going to pay for themselves.

“So, the take-home message with my program

is we can grow good wheat yields in Illinois,” Ebelhar summed. “We do need to be careful about any inputs we put on in any one given year. In general, a total-package high yield wheat management program often is not going to be economical for the average grower. Farmers just need to be more patient with learning what works and what doesn’t work for their particular location.”

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Dr. Steve Ebelhar, University of Illinois Agronomist with the Dixon Springs Research Center addresses growing high yield wheat in Illinois.

Photo by John LaRose Jr.