Funding Low, But Rust Battle Ready For '09

MISSISSIPPI STATE, MISS.

Efforts to beat soybean rust are already under way before the soybean crop is even in the ground in Mississippi, but without federal funding, experts are scrambling to secure money to monitor for the presence of the disease this year.

Soybean rust first appeared in Mississippi in 2004 and has been detected in more counties each subsequent year. In 2008, rust was detected in 79 of the state's 82 counties but caused no yield losses. Since soybean rust again made a late appearance, Mississippi State University specialists confidently recommended no large-scale treatments be made solely because of the virus.

Tom Allen, an Extension plant pathologist at Mississippi State University's Delta Research and Extension Center in Stoneville, said some money from 2008 operations was carried over to partially fund operations in 2009.

"In addition, we submitted a proposal to the Mississippi Soybean Promotion Board for funds that would be added to those remaining from 2008 to operate the program through the duration of 2009," Allen said.

The MSU Extension Service Soybean Rust Scouting Team observed approximately 1,208 locations last year. Of these, 659 were soybeans, 542 were kudzu and seven were coral bean, Allen said.

As of early March, some locations in the southwestern part of the state had actively growing kudzu and a single location was reporting volunteer soybeans, but there was no soybean rust present. Nearby states were not as disease-free.

Alabama had one positive kudzu location near Mobile. Florida had low levels of active rust in one location. Texas had one location with rust on volunteer soybeans in an irrigated cabbage patch in Brownsville, not far from the Mexico border.

Georgia had one location with rust on kudzu, and Louisiana had five parishes with active soybean rust on kudzu in well-protected locations. Cold weather makes kudzu go dormant, and rust generally will not survive on kudzu unless it is growing in a protected location, such as behind or inside a building.

"One of the Louisiana locations is in Franklinton. This is approximately 13 miles from a sentinel plot that we have been using south of Tylertown, within sight of the Louisiana/Mississippi state line," Allen said. "We will be monitoring this sentinel plot very carefully."

Trey Koger, MSU Extension soybean specialist, said the 2009 sentinel plots should be planted by March 10 at 20 locations across the state.

"We plant sentinel plots earlier than soybeans in commercial production, and we pick locations that are scattered across the state where soybean rust might first appear," Koger said.

Scouts will visit these sentinel plots weekly looking for the presence of rust. They will also scout for rust in kudzu and in commercial soybean fields throughout the state.

Both Allen and Koger said that no one should get complacent about the disease.

"Even though yield losses that can be specifically attributed to soybean rust have been zero in Mississippi over the past four seasons, this disease has the potential to move quickly and under the right conditions, can cause yield reductions. To this point, soybean rust has not caused any yield reductions in Mississippi in any year since it first reached the United States in 2004," said Koger. Δ