

# Justify *The Applications*

## Specialist Asks Farmers To Hold Fungicide Treatments Until Really Needed

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A program on early application of fungicides was presented recently by Dr. Don Hershman, University of Kentucky extension plant pathologist.

Hershman had his presentation planned when he saw on the news concerns from consumers about herbicide and fungicide applications.

"We have a wheat field day here and I'm going to talk about the trend toward early application of fungicides, and I'm actually going to insert comments about that news program. They were talking about how this new study had shown that pesticides are impacting our children in new ways. Part of what we do is always encourage people to use any pesticide, and in this case fungicide, when they need it.

"One thing that has me concerned about this trend toward early applications is that, in my opinion, there's really not a lot of justification for making early applications," he said. "The general mentality seems to be 'we'll just throw it in,' you know, 'it's cheap.' Mostly we're talking reduced rates but multiple fungicides manufacturers have this early fungicide program in place. I have some research trials where other companies are moving in that direction as well; you know, it's sort of like a marketing band wagon, and nobody wants to miss the boat."

Hershman said his concern is that sometimes people forget that this is a different environment, as far as the way people perceive their food supply and the safety of it.

"We remember years ago when we had this Alar thing and there were just major repercussions, especially concerns for children," he continued. "It really shakes people to their foundation and they begin to mistrust; then laws are changed and my concern is, if we continue down this path of making applications that we can't justify in the long run, we're shooting ourselves in the foot and it opens the door for justifiable criticism."

So for the past several years he and other researchers have been looking at these fungicide treatments in different research trials.

"I've just not seen much evidence, really, that it's a good thing for us to do in soft red winter wheat," he said.

There are times and places where early applications are helpful, particularly where the early disease of tan spot might be a problem; or in some places like Louisiana maybe stripe rust that comes in early.

"So I'm not throwing it under the bus entirely, because there are some situations where these early applications are helpful," Hershman said. "We're basically talking about applying a fungicide about the time you put your herbicide out which would be just before or during stem elongation. That's several weeks earlier than we would normally recommend a fungicide application."

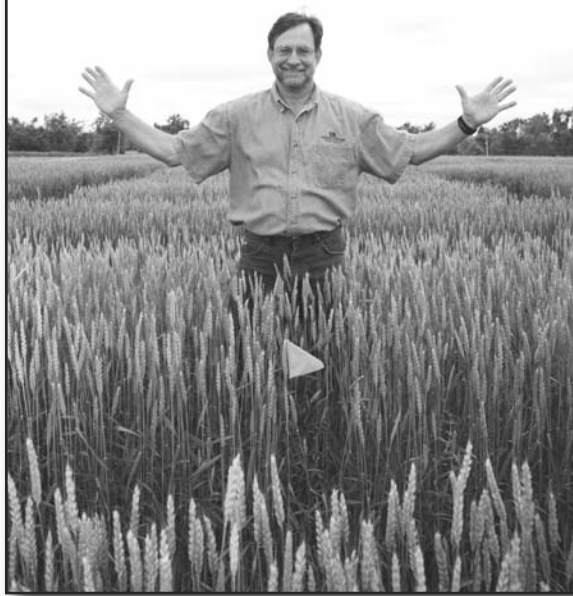
The mentality to apply treatments just because "we're going across the field anyway" just in case there are aphids is not a good one.

"I have some demonstration plots that show very little difference between the treated, different treatments, and untreated; and, in my opinion, the data suggests that any disease that does develop can be taken care of fairly easily," he said. "Most of the time my feeling is that these early applications are a waste of money. Whether they would cause much environmental damage is probably questionable but, at the same time, perception is the key. And the pub-

lic prefers, in general, that we produce food without pesticides, period. There is a trend toward that thinking, so this study that was reported on yesterday is like a warning to me. It has me concerned. Most farmers, because they live in a different world, they don't quite understand that. I don't live in this other world either but my ear is open and I can hear these rumblings and can remember things like the Alar scare and how it affected the sale of apples. Public opinion is broiling slowly and you can just feel it rising up and this kind of thing feeds it, in my opinion."

Hershman said his research shows people may be over applying fungicides.

**Dr. Don Hershman, University of Kentucky Extension Plant Pathologist, recently talked about herbicide and the trend to early fungicide applications.** Photo by John LaRose, Jr.



"I just haven't had any good results and I'm sure all my colleagues that do applied research have studied and just haven't seen much evidence that these early applications help much," Hershman continued. "With the exception of these very specific scenarios in very specific states, early application really isn't worth much."

So his message is, "even if it's not hurting your pocketbook too much right now because you're typically looking at lower rates or cheaper products, if you're not doing any good, it's not a good idea to make that application, because in the long run, you could hurt yourself."

The availability of these pesticides may be alluring; however, when you have something that works really good, the price is good, you feel good about it, that doesn't justify its use.

"We've all seen that in just about every crop at some level," he said. "We are trying to get growers to use fungicides only when they truly need them, and the idea of scheduled applications really is not the way to go. It's the way most people still do it and a lot of it is logistical reasons; for logistical reasons they make scheduled applications. It is easier, but at the same time it results in a lot of applications that aren't necessary." △

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