

Maximize Winter Wheat Yield To Take Advantage Of High Prices



JACKSON, MO.

Wheat futures are up nearly 40 percent in the past two months as a historic drought has reduced the U.S. corn crop production to a six-year low. With wheat prices in the \$8 per bushel range, farmers planting winter wheat should consider using seed treatments to maximize yield and to take advantage of the higher commodity prices.

Charlie Hinkebein grows corn, soybeans and wheat on his 2,600 acre farm near Chaffee, Mo., and he is a firm believer in the power of seed treatments. Hinkebein has used seed treatments as part of his row-crop program on his way to becoming a perennial corn and soybean yield contest champion.

He says every wheat field he plants is now treated with a fungicide and insecticide combination in addition to N-Hibit®, a Harpin protein that activates a plant's natural ability to protect itself and enhance production. "N-Hibit has performed very well for us," Hinkebein says. "It provides increased plant health, vigor, larger root masses and has improved overall systemic growth of the plants. We've also noticed it suffered less frost damage than non-treated plants last year and stayed green throughout the winter."

Hinkebein's treated fields have yielded up to 116 bushels per acre while his neighbors' wheat fields have yielded between 70 bushels to 75 bushels per acre under similar conditions. "We're spending around \$8 per bushel on seed treatments on our wheat all together," Hinkebein says. "When you can make between 25-30 bushels per acre more with almost \$9 wheat, it's not hard to figure out it makes good financial sense to spend the extra money on the seed treatments."

Hinkebein works with Brian Lewis of TH Equipment to have his seed treated on-site. Lewis uses a portable treater to apply fungicides, insecticides and other seed treatments on his customers' farms in Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Southeast Missouri and Tennessee. Lewis says many farmers have moved past the question of whether they should treat their wheat to looking at the seed treatment plan that best fits their needs.

Lewis offers a number of seed treatments options for his customers, but he is especially recommending N-Hibit this year. "N-Hibit turns on a plant's stress-defense and growth systems," Lewis says. "Research, field trials, and producer experience show that the result is improved plant health, root mass, nutrient

uptake, and reproductive growth. Wheat treated with N-Hibit will be more tolerant of environmental stresses, such as the drought we are currently experiencing, and will provide farmers with improved yield."

Hinkebein says the way seed treatments protect crop health, even in extreme circumstances, cannot be ignored. "A couple of years ago we were dealing with a lot of rain and flooding in our wheat fields and we had a few fields that were under water for four days," Hinkebein says. "Only one of those fields had seed with a treatment package and it ended up yielding 72 bushels per acre. The other fields were untreated and ended up making between 18 and 22 bushels per acre. Since then we won't plant a single acre of wheat without a seed treatment package."

A solid seed treatment package will include a fungicide and insecticide to provide improved germination and protection from both seed and soil-borne disease and pests. A combination package will provide protection from a number of potential problems including: Fusarium, wheat smut, rhizome root rot, early season rust, wheat scab, aphids, wire worms, armyworms, cereal leaf beetles, and Hessian flies. This allows the wheat plant to establish itself and put down good roots.

"We can apply seed treatment packages that vary in price from \$4 to \$10 per bushel," Lewis says. "Applying a seed treatment pays dividends by preventing yield drag and providing farmers with peace of mind. There are lots of things to worry about during the growing season and seed treatments can help farmers by eliminating some of the guess work."

At a minimum, Lewis recommends wheat growers apply a fungicide and insecticide package to their seed. "The long, warm spring and summer has increased insect pressure. Incorporating an insecticide into your seed treatment package will help growers beat fall infestations and lower seedling mortality rates. We see economic gains from seed treatment fungicides even when conditions are dry."

Managing wheat for maximum yield starts with seed decisions such as seed treatment. Farmers can take advantage of high wheat prices and protect yield with a seed treatment package tailored to meet their needs.

Farmers interested in on-farm seed treatment services or more information about seed treatment packages can contact Lewis at (573) 382-6975. △



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