Research Program Brings UK Recommendations To West Ky. Fields

PRINCETON, KY.

For years, University of Kentucky College of Agriculture crop specialists have conducted research and developed recommendations to help the state's farmers increase their bottom lines by increasing yields in the most cost-effective way. In the past, these recommendations were based on research from small, controlled plots. Currently, a UK soybean field agronomist and grain crops specialist are studying how applicable UK recommendations are in large-scale plots under typical field conditions in west Kentucky.

This study, called the soybean management verification program, is in the midst of its first growing season. It is funded by the Kentucky Soybean Board.

"This program allows us to look at things that farmers are thinking about, perhaps find a thing or two that we've missed. On the flipside, it really helps the farmers see the total program we've put together based on years of research at the university," said Chad Lee, UK grain crops specialist and primary investigator on the project.

Lee is guiding Jason Sarver, UK agronomist, in working with farmers in Lyon, Trigg, Hickman, Fulton, Graves and Muhlenberg counties. Using fields between 30 and 80 acres, Sarver is applying UK recommendations on half the field and has instructed farmers to use their normal soybean management practices, including spray schedules, input usage and seeding rates, on the other half. This set-up allows a side-by-side comparison of the two management practices.

"Farmers want to know how our research and the subsequent recommendations apply in their fields and growing conditions," Sarver said. "With smaller plots, you don't get the same level of variability that we see in these larger fields – variability that producers see on a day-to-day basis."

West Kentucky is a diverse crop-growing region with different soil types and growing conditions. This project allows researchers to study the performance of UK's recommendations with these variables.

"It's really going to give our researchers a new avenue for research," Sarver said. "For example, if we're recommending plant stands of 100,000 plants per acre and farmers are still attempting to achieve 180,000 plants per acre, we want to know why. Maybe the 180,000 is economical for them; maybe they have a different soil condition and our seeding recommendations don't apply. This information might lend us to go out and conduct seed population studies on sites or under conditions where our rates were less profitable than those of the producer."

Lee said this study could be the first step in making UK recommendations more county or area specific.

While this UK project is just beginning, similar programs in other states have proven beneficial to both farmers and researchers. Sarver hopes to continue the research with current producers and expand the program to other counties next growing season.

Recently, Sarver and Lee presented information on the program during the UK College of Agriculture Field Day at the Research and Education Center in Princeton. Many field day attendees, especially in counties not currently involved in the project, expressed interest in participating next year.

At the end of this season, Sarver and Lee plan to publish cost and economic comparisons of plots grown with UK recommendations and plots using current farming practices.

Sarver said even though they are now working with soybeans with the backing of the Kentucky Soybean Board, the program could be used with other row crops, such as wheat or corn.

Interested individuals can get up-to-date information on the project at http://soymvp.blogspot.com/. Δ