

Rice Seed Rate: How Low Can You Go?

Reducing Rice Seed Rates Can Actually Help To Increase Yield Potential.

BERNIE, MO.

Just five or ten years ago rice consultant Steven Parks was using 90- to 100-pound seeding rates most of the time on the conventional varieties his growers planted. "Now we are planting anywhere from 50 to 80 pounds with the newer conventional and Clearfield varieties," says Parks, who lives in Corning, Arkansas. "Of course we are probably using more seed treatments than we did five or ten years ago but we have better seed treatments available to us at this time. You also need to look at each variety differently. The disease package is one of the main reasons we are planting lower seeding rates. We have to plant a little thinner with certain varieties in order to get an optimum stand which in turn lessens disease, and helps to avoid lodging. Certain varieties tiller better than others so you have to

stands than I did in thicker stands. You were better off with the thinner stands and of course the less nitrogen you put out, to a point, the better off you were in relation to the past season with the diseases we had.

"We are able to maintain consistent yields with planting thinner stands of higher quality seed. This past year was off but if we can go straight across the farm and we can pull 170 to 180 bushels dry yield, then that is what we aim for. This past season was a little off around 160 bushels per acre but in a year where disease set in late we still finished strong overall."

Parks says that the main thing is paying attention to your variety selection in relation to field history and paying attention to the seed size or seeds per pound. Concentrate on figuring out the seeding rates you need up front and

By planting high quality rice seed, growers can lower their seed rates while increasing their yield potential.



plant the ones that don't tiller as well a little thicker."

Parks now recommends planting 60 to 65 pounds per acre of varieties like CL151. That is his target seeding rate but he thinks that growers can go as low as 50 to 55 pounds per acre at times.

"Sometimes we try to calibrate drills to plant what we want to but it doesn't always work out that way," he says. "We end up a little heavy or a little light sometimes. Most of the time we plant somewhere around 60 pounds on CL151 and we will combine that with a three-way fungicide program. I like to use Apron Maxx/Dynasty/zinc seed treatments. Mostly we will use Apron Maxx and zinc but sometimes I'll add Dynasty if I am concerned about the seed source and the variety is susceptible to blast.

"If the seed production field had an occurrence of blast the year before, we put in the Dynasty. This will help alleviate some of the blast spores on the seed from transmitting to the plant and having an incidence of blast coming in the field earlier in the season than normal. If you know that there was an occurrence of blast the year before, it would be best to avoid that seed, but in certain situations you have no other alternative."

High Quality Seed

With the advent of higher cost seed, growers realize the need to reduce their seeding rate. Planting high quality seed enables growers to plant seeds/acre instead of pounds/acre. "The quality of seed is very important and it's something that we pay a lot of attention to," says Parks. "You don't always know what you are getting when you have seed pulled in from outer sources that you are not familiar with which changes your setup and what kind of seed treatments you are going to use.

"That is why we like to use a company like Tanner Seed because they have a good reputation of producing high quality seed that has the strictest quality control standards. We can plant less seed while increasing our yields because we are reducing lodging and our plant population will have less disease because of better air circulation than a heavily populated stand. That holds true especially in a season like last year. I saw fewer instances of disease in thinner

pay attention to detail because when you go with these lower seeding rates, you definitely need to use seed fungicides and insecticides.

"I like to use products such as Cruiser and Dermacor X-100. We have a lot of trouble with rice water weevils so I try to put Dermacor X-100 on what I can. I realize that it's an expensive treatment but with rice water weevils, Dermacor X-100 really does a great job."

Steven Parks' territory includes Ripley and Butler counties in Missouri, and Clay, Greene and Randolph counties in Arkansas.

Increase Yields

One of Parks' growers has been planting lower seed rates for the past couple years. Rice grower John French agrees that when you plant lower seed rates you can still increase your yields because of reduced lodging and less disease.

"That is exactly why we have lowered our seeding rates," says French, who lives in Neelyville, Missouri. "We also have less input costs and as high as everything is, that's on everybody's mind right now. Less disease and less lodging is big factor and when we first started planting CL151 it was around 70 to 75 pounds per acre. Two years ago we lowered it to 50 to 55 pounds per acre and it was our best yielding rice. It beat everything—the hybrids and the conventional—and that was with a lower seeding rate.

"Our yields have steadily increased as our plant population has decreased. There is going to be a point where you can't decrease it anymore but as of now our yields have gone up every year due to a combination of plant population, better quality seed varieties and the introduction of CL151 and the hybrid seed. Probably in the last five years the recommendations from the crop consultants and universities have been to lower your seeding rate and your yields will still increase.

"Seed producers such as Tanner Seed Co. do a good job of providing high quality seed. They raise a good crop and it is always clean. If you are not sure of your seed source, especially with a lot of diseases that can be carried over in the seed, you can end up hurting yourself. But I have faith in Tanner Seed Co. I have been buying seed from them since 1994." Δ

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