

Soybean Seed Shortage To Increase Production Risks

STONEVILLE, MISS.

With soybean seed in short supply in 2008, Mississippi soybean growers are facing increased production risks including unproven varieties and poor-quality seed.

Mississippi State University Extension Service specialists recommend producers research available varieties to minimize these risks.

"We're not going to have replant options this year because of the seed shortage," said Trey Koger, MSU Extension soybean specialist. "Most likely we are going to have one shot at getting a stand, and we don't need to plant too early when conditions are cool and wet. Be aware of our optimal planting window from April 5 to April 20."

Soybean seed demand is outpacing supply all over the state, with the most popular varieties proving to be the most difficult, if not impossible, to obtain.

Koger said for information about unfamiliar varieties, producers should refer to Extension personnel, seed distributors, seed companies, the Internet, other states' variety trials and the Mississippi Soybean Variety Trials.

"Over the past three years, we've tested 830 different varieties in the Mississippi variety trials," Koger said. "That's going to be an excellent resource to fall back on to provide information on some varieties that we just don't know a lot about."

Results of the Mississippi Soybean Variety Trials are published annually and are available at county Extension offices and online.

Koger said a critical aspect to consider before buying soybean seed is its germination rating, which describes the seed's chances of development.

"About 40 percent of the seed samples being tested for germination in the state seed testing lab are running low germination, with most of it due to mechanical damage that occurred during harvest or post-harvest cleaning," Koger said. "That is a big concern. When seed has low germination due to mechanical damage, we can't do anything about it but plant more seed to account for the low germination."

The soybean specialist said other key traits to

research include a variety's resistance to disease, ability to withstand waterlogged conditions, performance on different soil types like heavy clay, ability to grow on narrow or wide row spacings and accelerated aging test score, which is a good measure of overall seed quality.

Mississippi soybean acreage could approach 2 million in 2008 if weather permits and seed is available for planting, Koger said. This would be a 25 percent increase over 2007 and the state's highest acreage in a decade.

Demand is high for soybeans in 2008 due to their record price levels and their comparatively low requirement for fertilizer – a production input that has risen in cost by 25 percent to 40 percent since 2007.

Soybean seed supplies are limited because of adverse weather conditions last year in seed-growing regions of the country, said Dan Poston, MSU northwest district Extension soybean specialist based in Stoneville.

"In southern Illinois, for example, extreme heat during pod fill decreased seed viability, and the hot, dry conditions throughout the year reduced production volume," Poston said. "Rain delayed harvest in several seed-growing regions, resulting in seed deterioration and overall reductions in seed quality. Consequently, seed companies have had to make major cuts in their supplies for 2008 to remove poor-quality seed."

Floyd Trammel, general manager of Farmer's Inc., a seed distributor in Greenville, said he normally orders enough soybean seed to cover typical customer needs, plus a little extra.

"When we did that this year, the seed companies came back and cut those allocations considerably, some more than 50 percent," Trammel said.

He said the main varieties producers want are in the biggest demand and shortest supply.

"Asgrow 4703, DeKalb 46-51 and Pioneer 94B73 are three of the hottest ones that are being requested right now," Trammel said.

Trammel said he bought varieties he usually does not buy in order to offset the cutbacks this year.

"We're going to have soybeans for our producers," Trammel said. "It just might not be the variety they asked for." Δ