

# UA Computerized Rice Program Is Providing Answers

STUTTGART, ARK.

**B**rooks Davis, who has a rice farm east of Stuttgart, uses the DD50 computerized rice program “hot and heavy” during rice season, simply because “It keeps anything from sneaking up on us.”

Davis said the program keeps him from missing important dates for such things as applications of fertilizer and herbicide. “In the old days, missed dates used to happen.”

He said he has missed an important herbicide application date, and weeds became harder to control.

The DD50 program has been updated and contains most of the important information Arkansas farmers need to help them make informed management decisions.

The program is so helpful, says Dr. Chuck Wilson, extension rice specialist with the Division of Agriculture, that “I wouldn’t farm without one even if I had been farming for 40 years.”

The program is being used on about 40 percent of Arkansas’ 1.3 million acres in 2008, Wilson estimated. “But many farmers use the Internet version to predict and don’t use the traditional sign-up through the county office, so many more than 40 percent of rice farmers probably benefit from the program.”

The program, funded by the Arkansas Rice Research and Promotion Board, evolved out of a computerized decision-making tool invented at the University of Arkansas in the 1970s.

“The first version was developed to help farmers predict when rice reach the stage for mid-season nitrogen. It was expanded to include 26 other management practices,” Wilson said.

“The current version uses the daily high and low temperatures as estimated by the 30-year weather average plus current weather. Heat units are accumulated based on daily tempera-

tures. Growth stages are triggered by an accumulation of a certain number of heat units.”

The DD50 program can’t cure the common cold, but it can predict timings for all major practices ranging from fertilization to harvest.

“It’s very valuable for farmers, and consultants who manage a large number of fields,” Wilson said. “It’s updated annually with all the new hybrids and varieties on the market.”

The program isn’t just used by farmers. The summary information contained in the program is used by operators of grain dryers and mills to prepare for harvest. “They can estimate when peak harvest will be and prepare accordingly, and it gives them an idea of the varieties that will be coming.”

Wilson uses the program to generate acreage reports for each county. The program can help him estimate the number of acres of each variety grown in a county.

Wilson said it’s also helping him to help him study the influence of four planting dates at Stuttgart on new varieties at three Arkansas locations.

“This allows me to prepare and plan each field so that management practices don’t get overlooked. I know, based on DD50, that on a certain date I need to apply fertilizer, fungicides and pesticides. By having this information up front, I don’t miss the critical practice at growth stage.”

The DD50 program is not infallible, according to Wilson. He cautioned that DD50 predictions are estimates and can be influenced slightly by “extremely odd weather patterns, delaying flooding that could delay the maturity of the crop more than DD50 would predict.”

Wilson urged rice farmers to contact their county agent and ask about enrolling their farm in the program. Δ



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