

UK Part Of National Effort To Boost Soybean Yields

LEXINGTON, KY.

Soybeans often take second place to corn during the growing season. As a result, farmers are likely losing on efficiency of production and on final yields in soybeans, said Chad Lee, a University of Kentucky agronomist.

Lee is spearheading Kentucky's part of a national initiative to boost soybean yields. The research and outreach effort is being funded by a \$495,000 grant from the United Soybean Board production committee and includes UK, Iowa State University, University of Minnesota, Michigan State University, University of Arkansas, and Louisiana State University.

"We are going to investigate current production practices to see where yields can be improved," Lee said. "In addition, we are curious as to how management practices affect soybean seed composition. We will test some of these strategies across six states from north to south and hopefully develop some very good management recommendations. The fact that the United Soybean Board is funding this project tells us that we will be doing research of critical interest to soybean producers."

In 2008, soybean production in Kentucky and many other states is expected to increase because of high prices and low stocks. However, soybean production is facing increased competition internationally from South America and domestically from corn acres needed to feed ethanol production.

George Martin, a Nebo farmer and member of the United Soybean Board production committee, was the one who made the motion to fund

the grant.

"I got a pretty quick second on that," he said. "There are a lot of things that can come out of this research. If you look at the states involved, it goes from the Great Lakes to the Gulf, and there's a wide variance of research that is going to be going on. This is a place to start to see what we need to look at and pinpoint for more research."

Martin said the main thrust will be on what the biggest yield robbers are, and that could be different in different locations. He said he also anticipates the work will look at other issues such as quality.

Kentucky producers have complained in recent years about what they perceived as stagnant soybean yields. Current soybean varieties have the potential to yield more than 100 bushels per acre, but this potential is almost never realized. Kentucky's statewide average record soybean yield of 44 bushels per acre was set in 2004 and 2006. Yields in 2007 were down to an estimated 27 bushels per acre due primarily to poor weather conditions during the growing season.

The project will start in the fall of 2008 and continue through 2011. The six states represented account for 33 percent of soybean production nationwide. The effort's underlying goal is to help soybeans stay competitive as part of the crop rotation.

Soybean producers need to maximize production efficiency and yield to keep soybeans competitive with corn domestically and competitive with other soybean regions nationally. Δ