

Wheat Planting Considerations



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Many producers locked in wheat contracts for 2011 at or over \$7 per bushel and some are growing wheat for the first time in several years. We have heard that seed supplies may be tight in some areas of the mid-South. If this is true in your area, you may be tempted to skimp on seeding rates in order to cover more acres. If so, just know what your risks are by cutting back and proceed with caution.

Maximum wheat yields normally require a final stand of 30 to 35 plants per square foot, but under the right conditions, stands as low as 20 plants per square foot will yield well. Getting a successful stand requires several things, including timely seeding, an accurate seeding rate, correct seed depth (1.0 to 1.5 inches), adequate soil moisture, and no seedling diseases.

Wheat should be planted from about October 10 to October 30 for most of Kentucky. This window normally provides the best opportunity for getting a good stand and good growth before the cold winter months. Seed rates can be 30 to 35 seeds per square foot, but if you are considering dropping back a little, planting early is the time to try it. Otherwise, if planting occurs after October 30, then the seed rate should be 35 to 40 seeds per square foot. These seed rates as-

sume a standard germination of 90 percent. For seed lots with lower standard germinations, a higher seeding rate is needed.

A spreadsheet is available to help folks achieve their target seeding rates with seed lots of different size and quality (http://www.bae.uky.edu/ext/Grain_Storage/calculators.htm). Seed costs per acre are also calculated for different plant populations to see the benefits of timely planting. A calculation is also made to assist with drill calibration for each seed lot.

Drill calibration is essential to plant the correct amount of seeds. This process takes time and should be conducted with each seed lot you receive. If you do not have the time and/or patience for this procedure, then hire someone to calibrate your drill. This procedure will benefit your wheat production system. Guidelines on calibrating wheat drills is available in the ID:125 Comprehensive Guide to Wheat Management, Chapter 4 "Planting and Drill Calibration" <http://www.uky.edu/Ag/GrainCrops/ID125Section4.html>.

Adjusting the drill for planting depth also takes time but will result in better stands. These adjustments need to be made in the field on the day of planting. Field conditions change from day to day and the pressure needed to get the desired depth may change day to day as well.

So, if you decide you are short on wheat and you want to skimp on seed, be sure you know the conditions in which you are planting. If possible, try to skimp in situations that will still provide a chance for good stand establishment. In a year when a large part of the 2011 crop may already be sold, skimping on seeding rates should only be used as a last resort. Δ

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