

News Column
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WHEAT FUNGICIDES

No two years are the same in farming. That said, conditions for the 2015 and 2016 wheat crops were very similar in this part of the state. We had dry winters. The crop looked crummy in many Riley county fields. And then it rained.

In 2015 we heard warnings about stripe rust and had lots of discussions about applying fungicides at about the boot stage. But it hadn't rained yet and some fields looked like they would make just 20 bushels per acre at best. A ten percent increase in yield on a 20 bushel per acre field didn't seem like a good investment.

And then it rained.

In 2015, fields that looked like 20 bushel per acre wheat in mid-April eventually produced 35 to 40 bushel per acre yields after late April rains and cool May temperatures. Some fields that received a fungicide application made 50 to 60 bushels per acre. In 2015, fungicides on wheat would have paid big dividends.

The 2016 wheat crop suffered through similar conditions. We had big rains in early December of 2015, then nothing until April 15, 2016. By the first of May, when it was time to make a fungicide decision, many fields didn't have a lot of stripe rust. It was so dry through mid-April that there wasn't a lot of rust development.

And then it rained some more.

Anecdotal evidence – meaning I've only talked to a couple of farmers at the time I'm

writing this – suggests that a fungicide application would have paid big dividends again in 2016. The few farmers that I visited with about fungicides in late April will tell you that I was clearly on the fence. I wasn't convinced that we would see a benefit, but I told them that if they had their own sprayer and some extra time, then I would recommend applying a generic fungicide. Not the high dollar stuff; just the generic.

I believe it was April 27 when I got a text from my brother-in-law (who works for a big Co-op west of here), asking if we wanted to apply a fungicide to our wheat in Saline county. I replied something like, “maybe/probably, but not the high dollar stuff – the generic works just as well.”

When I got to the office on April 28 I found Eric DeWolf's fungicide recommendations and quickly forwarded that info to him. Eric is the Extension plant pathologist at K-State who keeps an eye on wheat diseases, and who also does some research on wheat fungicides.

The product that my brother-in-law was leaning toward applying would have cost about \$20 per acre, including the application fee. The generic that we ended up applying cost just under \$10 per acre applied. I believe the aerial application fee was \$8 per acre and the generic fungicide was maybe \$1.84. Cheap stuff.

The choice of wheat fungicides is either strobilurins or triazoles, or a combination of the two. In past years we have talked about one of them having just preventative activity and the other having a degree of curative effect, meaning that it could knock back a bit of rust that had already started developing. Now, we're just telling you not to worry about that terminology. Either one will work.

What really matters is the timing. If the fungicide is applied timely, it doesn't matter which one you choose. Efficacy differences among wheat fungicide products are minuscule.

The boot stage, just before heading, is when a fungicide application should be made.

Next year will be different and we'll have to decide in mid to late April of 2017 if we think a fungicide application will pay. What I think we've learned though is that we don't need to put much effort into choosing the product to apply. Timing – not early and not late – is what matters.

If you have questions, you can reach me at the Riley County Extension Office at 785/537-6350. Or, you can send e-mail to gmclure@ksu.edu.

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