

News Column

by Greg McClure, KSU-Riley County Extension Agriculture Agent
110 Courthouse Plaza
Manhattan, KS 66502

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Phone: 785/537-6350
Fax: 785/537-6353

SPLIT APPLICATION OF WHEAT FUNGICIDE

It is well known that I'm a penny pincher. Ask my kids or my wife, or ask just about anybody that knows me. I don't like spending money foolishly.

Call me cheap. Call me tight. Call me frugal if you want to be polite. It doesn't really matter to me. Because I like my frugality.

Sorry about that. Dr. Seuss took over my brain for just a moment. But, let's move on...

Being the conservative spender that I am, I immediately become a skeptic when I see news stories about split applications of wheat fungicides – applying a shot now and another shot later, at the flag leaf stage. Everything I have read suggests that a fungicide application at the flag leaf stage has the greatest probability of generating a profit. Applications made at jointing, in K-State studies, have rarely been profitable.

The argument in favor of a split fungicide application goes like this:

- It is low cost because there is no additional application cost if the fungicide is tank-mixed with another product already being applied, like nitrogen fertilizer or herbicide. However, the optimum timing for an early fungicide application would be after jointing (if it is going to help at all), while the optimum timing for fertilizer and herbicide applications is before jointing.
- The fungicide can provide suppression of early season diseases like tan spot, powdery mildew, speckled leaf blotch, and maybe stripe rust. OK. Maybe.

The downside possibilities of an early season fungicide application include:

- Leaves not present at the time of the application will not be protected. Lots of leaves develop between now and harvest time. Therefore, early fungicide applications won't control leaf rust and stripe rust epidemics that blow in from the south later in the season. And, most leaf rust and stripe rust epidemics do blow in from the south later in the season.
- Additional product costs may not pay off, especially when wheat prices are low, like they are this year. Really, there isn't much evidence that the early application will make you money anyway. The real work in a split application system is done by the second application, the one made at flag leaf stage.

In K-State studies, the best chance of turning a profit with early, low-rate fungicide applications is in continuous, no-till wheat planted to varieties susceptible to either tan spot or powdery mildew. The value of an early application is diminished when crops are rotated, or in tillage systems.

The bottom line is that stripe rust and leaf rust rarely overwinter in Kansas. These diseases typically blow in from Texas and Oklahoma and don't create significant infections until our wheat is at about the flag leaf stage.

My conclusion is that an early application of fungicide – even though it is cheap, at maybe less than a dollar per acre for the product alone – isn't likely to generate a profit. Being the penny pincher that I am, I'll save that dollar and spend it at the flag leaf stage when it is more likely to do some good.

Ask my kids. It's just a dollar, but the dollars add up.....

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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