

News Column

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## SOYBEAN PLANTING DATES AND RATES

One of the perks of my job is that I get to learn something new just about every day. My path of learning is often guided by the most recent question I have received, either by phone or by e-mail.

If I don't lose focus — sometimes I'm distracted by the next question and sometimes I'm distracted by someone just walking by my office — I might kill half a day learning about something I didn't even care about at the start of the day.

For example, a couple of weeks ago I learned about Cushing's Disease. Did you know there are horses that have to be fed really low quality hay because they can almost get fat on "concrete and water"? It's similar to being diabetic and these horses need feed that is low in starches and sugars. They feed them the poor quality hay that I might reject.

Fascinating stuff, even to a guy who would rather buy gasoline for an ATV than feed for a horse.

Last week I headed down a path toward learning more about soybean planting dates and maturity groups. I saw an article that Ignacio Ciampitti had written for K-State's Agronomy e-Update and I killed a couple of hours trying to learn what's new.

It was a really long article!

The research cited in Ciampitti's article occurred in 2014, 2015, and 2016. The study looked at various maturity groups, and planting dates, at five different locations across the

eastern half of the state.

What did I learn? Essentially, I learned that we are already on target. For this part of the state we should be planting mostly maturity group 3.8 to 4.2 soybeans, and our ideal planting window is about May 5 to June 10. That's what we're already doing.

I'm not knocking the research because I appreciate being able to cite research that is relatively new instead of 30 years old. Genetics and farming practices change, so it is good to revisit some of the things we think we know already know. In this case, we're on target and we can just keep doing what we're doing.

It is interesting to note that Kansas soybean producers have been planting earlier and earlier each year, at a rate of about 1/3 day per year over the last 35 years. Over time, that adds up to 11 days earlier planting now than in the early 1980s.

Results will vary from year to year, but the research shows similar yields results for early May and late May planting dates. Yields start to decline when soybeans are planted later than about June 10 in Riley County.

In another series of studies, researchers have also looked at soybean seeding rates to determine the optimum plant population — the population that will give us the most yield for the dollars invested. We did some of those studies right here in Riley County 10 to 15 years ago and our results matched research results from more recent years.

The bottom line on plant populations is that 100,000 plants per acre is enough most of the time in Riley County. In lower yielding environments, 80,000 plants per acre maximized yield.

In our Riley County studies, producers with good planters achieved 85-95% emergence. Therefore, we determined that 120,000 seeds dropped would be our goal.

Producers whose planters weren't getting the job done, and some who were drilling

soybeans, were getting just 50% survival when we compared their seeding rate to their final stand. In those situations, the best approach was not to increase the seeding rate, but to invest in a better planter.

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 [gmcclure@ksu.edu](mailto:gmcclure@ksu.edu).

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