

News Column

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

For Release 02/01/21
Phone: 785/537-6350
Fax: 785/537-6353

BRING YOUR CAT TO WORK DAY

Those who know me well will agree that I am not a gambler. I don't gamble with my money in games of chance. I don't gamble with my life by doing foolish things. And I don't gamble in business by being an innovator – I am not prone to being the first to try new technology – I like to let someone else work out the bugs first.

I can't say that my conservative nature is a positive attribute – and there are plenty of folks who think I am too cautious – but it is who I am. I don't hit a lot of home runs because I don't swing for the fences at every opportunity, but I like to think I get on base a lot by sticking to the basics.

In the agronomy world, I find myself wanting to utilize variable rate technology for fertilizer, lime, and seed. Then I find myself drawn back to the basics of just taking soil tests on a regular basis to be sure basic fertility needs of the crop are met.

At times I will think I should be utilizing plant tissue testing to really fine-tune fertilizer applications,... but then I realize I don't even know where the different zones are in my fields. Once again, I need some basic soil test information first, and maybe some yield maps to help me identify those fertility zones.

Variable rate seeding is technology that is utilized by growers who can afford the technology to make it happen. I like the concept, and I know farmers who use it, but I wonder if most of us have even changed our seeding rates and dates over the last 30 years. Or, are we just

doing what Dad did?

Soybeans are an easy example to start with when looking at seeding rates. Twenty years ago I knew of several producers who planted 160,000 seeds per acre when seeding with a planter, and 210,000 seeds per acre when planting beans with a grain drill.

Research suggests that a final stand of 100,000 plants per acres is kind of the sweet spot in this part of the state. That plant population is cost effective and produces optimal yields. Thus, many producers have dropped their seeding rate to 120,000 seeds per acre, expecting about 85% emergence.

The ideal planting date for soybeans is a little harder to nail down, but I would argue that the “experts” who are promoting April soybean planting dates are probably wrong, and mid-May will be the right planting date more times than not.

We can have similar discussions about corn and grain sorghum planting dates and rates, but that is part of what we will discuss at the February 11 Coffee Shop Agronomy meeting, so I’ll wait to hear Ignacio Ciampitti’s thoughts before putting mine in print. I’m used to being wrong, but I try not to leave too much evidence.

Ciampitti will be the featured speaker on Thursday, February 11 when we host our next Coffee Shop Agronomy meeting virtually, via Zoom. The meeting will start at 11:00 a.m. and will adjourn at noon. Register online at www.riley.ksu.edu to receive Zoom link details.

The title of Ciampitti’s presentation is, “Best Management Practices for Row Crops – Focusing on Planting Practices.” We will discuss planting dates, rates, depth, and more, with hopes of helping producers fine-tune some of the things they may already do well.

Don’t worry if you don’t have experience with Zoom and aren’t sure you can handle the technology. It’s pretty easy. If you have a computer and an internet connection, you can at least

watch and listen.

On our end it isn't really a problem if you don't know what you're doing when try to use Zoom. We have control of the mute button and I can just silence you if I hear you arguing with your spouse,... or talking to the cat.

I hope you – and your cat – will join us on Thursday, February 11.

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.

K-State Research and Extension is an equal opportunity provider and employer.