

News Column

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

For Release 06/27/22  
Phone: 785/537-6350  
Fax: 785/537-6353

## DOUBLE CROPPING

I have mentioned before that I didn't think I would ever outgrow the "every year is a drought year" mentality that comes from growing up on a farm in what folks here would call western Kansas. I actually grew up on the west edge of north central Kansas, but it was still much drier there than it is here.

The average annual precipitation in Phillips County, where I grew up, is 25 inches. For Manhattan, the average annual precipitation is 35 inches. It might not sound like a big difference, but it is a huge difference to growing crops.

Our crop rotation when I was a child was wheat-milo-fallow. However, we still had many neighbors using a wheat-fallow-wheat rotation. Today, we have a rotation on our Phillips County farm that is much like what many farmers had in Riley County 20 years ago. It varies, with some continuous cropping, but it is some version of a corn-soybeans-wheat rotation, without the fallow period.

Now that my mind has made the adjustment to growing that extra crop out west, I am also to a point where I think double-crop should be a permanent part of our crop rotation here. If wheat is still in your rotation, another crop should be planted the day the wheat is harvested instead of waiting until the next spring to plant again.

This year's late wheat harvest is going to make the double-crop more challenging. During years when we harvest wheat June 15, planting those stubble fields back to soybeans has

been the most popular option for local farmers.

One reason soybeans became a popular double-crop options was the ease of weed control. At one time, soybeans could be planted right behind the combine, and weeds controlled entirely with post-emergence herbicides. When glyphosate was still effective, weed control was easy and affordable.

Now, if you are planting double-crop soybeans you will want to consider using a pre-emergent residual herbicide too. Still, it won't cost much more than it would have cost to just control the weeds during a fallow period, so a crop might as well be growing in those fields.

Agronomists recommend planting a soybean variety with the same maturity length as you would plant during your full-season planting window. Switching to an earlier maturing variety when planting late can result in very short plants with pods too close to the ground.

K-State agronomists also recommend applying up to 30 pounds of N if wheat yields were especially high. Since we don't normally apply N when planting beans, I need for someone to try this and let me know how it works out. I need to see it before I'll jump on that ship.

Double-crop soybeans might benefit from a slight increase in the seeding rate. If you normally plant 120,000 seeds per acre, consider kicking the rate up to 140,000 when double-cropping beans.

Probably the most important thing when planting double-crop soybeans is to get them in the ground just as soon as possible. Earlier planting (when already planting late) generally results in greater yields.

This late in the season, you might want to consider planting grain sorghum instead of soybeans. I know a farmer in Saline County – where the average annual rainfall is about 31 inches – who routinely plants double-crop grain sorghum behind wheat. His long-term average

for double-crop grain sorghum is 57 bushels per acre.

If you don't think 57 bushels is a high enough yield on double-crop milo, do the math. His expenses include planting, harvesting, fertilization, seed, and a shot of atrazine. It actually pays pretty well.

If you are also in the cattle business, then double-crop grain sorghum becomes a more attractive option because you can graze it, or even chop it for silage, if an early freeze halts grain production.

This year's late wheat harvest makes double-cropping more of a challenge, but high crop prices might encourage us to take a little more risk.

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](mailto:gmclure@ksu.edu).

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