

News Column

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SOYBEAN PLANTING DATE

I fired up one of my good friends in Clay county a month or so ago when I published a blurb in our e-newsletter suggesting that earlier soybean planting dates will producer higher yields. He shot an e-mail right back to me, pointing out that his double-crop beans, planted in July, were his highest yielding beans last year. He signed his note, “The Late ____ _____.”

It was late April when I wrote that article, suggesting that early May planting should be considered, so I wasn’t surprised by the response. Typically, we think May 15 to June 10 is a good soybean planting window for Riley county. So, May 5 is a strong deviation from the norm.

Nevertheless, I quickly responded to my friend (this would be a lot easier if I just told you his name is Marc, but I’m trying not to call him out) and told him he just got lucky last year! Any planting date past about June 10 will cost you bushels in a normal year.

In the studies cited in the article from which I gleaned my information, yields from Manhattan to Topeka declined by about 0.5 bushel per day when planting was delayed from early May to mid-late June. Those planting date studies were done from 2000 to 2002 and in 2010.

You can argue that the results might be different in the years not represented, and that mid-May might actually be a better time to plant than early May. And, guess what? I might agree with you. But, if you tell me mid to late June is just as good, then we’ll have an argument.

Planting dates studies from 1999 to 2010, and from Belleville to Topeka, consistently show a yield decline when planting in early to mid June instead of mid to late May. Planting

even later, from mid to late June, consistently produced even lower yields.

So, what is the ideal soybean planting window for our area? I'd choose about May 15 to June 10, and ideally, I'd like to plant beans the last half of May because I want to start planting grain sorghum on June 1. If you look at the map in the K-State Soybean Production Handbook, the ideal planting window for soybeans in Riley county is May 5 to June 15.

In the farming world we're never quite satisfied and this year is no exception. We were in a drought until about mid-April, and more recently it was too wet to plant. I can talk about ideal planting dates all I want, but you're obviously not going to plant in the mud. Instead, you'll plant when the ground is ready.

When it comes time to plant double-crop beans after wheat harvest, planting date becomes even more important because your earliest planting date is almost always after the ideal planting window. Every day counts when you're losing a half bushel per day. Some years the yield decline after June 15 is closer to a bushel per day.

If you're planning to plant double-crop soybeans, the planter needs to be hooked up so you're ready to plant just as soon as the combine starts to run. And, if you can find good help, it will pay to hire someone just to run the planter.

Do the math. You can pay a pretty good wage to hire someone to plant your double-crop beans just a day earlier. If you wait until wheat harvest is complete before starting to plant, then you're losing big money.

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.

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