

Weather plays role in soybean rust

FARMERS learned big lessons about fungi last summer as they watched and waited for the spread of Asian soybean rust. Although the disease did not envelop the soybean-producing region of the United States as rapidly as it did in Brazil, American farmers are not out of the woods yet, according to X.B. Yang, a plant pathologist specializing in the disease.

"Unfavorable weather conditions last year did not allow us to draw a meaningful conclusion about how severe Asian soybean rust might be in the U.S.," says Yang of Iowa State University.

Freezing conditions into northern Florida restricted the distribution of rust spores in the kudzu plants in which they overwintered. Then drought in Louisiana and Mississippi prevented widespread movement of the disease during summer months. "The prevailing winds were to the east most of the summer," Yang says. "So the wind did not help the spores to move north."

Yang points to rainfall maps in China that show rust developing mostly in areas with the greatest rainfall. The weather forecast for 2006 predicts normal rainfall for most of the United States, which should help keep rust spores from traveling extensively, he says.

"Based on the weather forecast, the risk of an epidemic this summer is not high. But forecasts can change. It's hard to tell this far in advance," Yang says. "No, we are not yet out of the woods when it comes to soybean rust."

Don't be complacent

Word that soybean rust has been found in Texas ahead of the planting season is a warning sign that farmers shouldn't let down their guard. Being ready for rust is one reason to carefully monitor your soybean fields. Last year brought the soybean-rust issue almost to the level of hysteria, but at least growers know there are tools that will contain the disease, and those tools may bring about other benefits.

Three steps farmers need to follow in 2006 are:

- Scout to determine if there is economic need for a preventive treatment.
- Treat before the disease gets established and curative steps are needed.
- Get good coverage to keep the disease from moving up into the plants.

Treating soybean plants at the R-3 stage with a fungicide is a good practice that can show a healthy economic return. That preventive treatment may also provide healthy benefits to the plant, even if rust is not present. As research continues this year, plant pa-

Key Points

- Weather conditions will determine how widespread soybean rust is this summer.
- Farmers are better off being prepared to deal with the arrival of soybean rust.
- Studies show plant health benefits from applying strobilurin fungicides.

thologists will be looking at the added benefits of fungicide application. Some plant pathologists have no-

ticed an apparent "greening effect" to the plant after fungicide application, especially with the strobilurin class of fungicides.

It appears the mode of action for some fungicides may cause a boost in photosynthesis and a better use of nitrogen, which can lead to a yield bump.

As a preventive treatment, spraying soybeans at R-3 stage resulted in a 6.1-bushel-per-acre advantage over plants that were not treated, says Wayne

Pederson, associate professor of plant pathology at the University of Illinois.

R-3 is when the plant turns its energy to grain fill and production of seeds. Pederson's tests covered widespread environmental conditions across Illinois involving eight soybean varieties. Treatments were made at 6.2 ounces per acre of a strobilurin-class fungicide. Applications put 20 gallons per acre at 70 pounds per square inch with drop-lets in the 250- to 300-micron size.

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