

DAVID'S DESK



An update on soybean health issues from David Wright Ph.D., education director of the NCSRP's Plant Health Initiative

Asian soybean rust: A season of hype or reason to hope?

Some may argue that the intense amount of discussion and coverage of Asian soybean rust (ASR) in the past 10 months served only to scare soybean producers into girding for a battle that never came. Others might believe it was an attempt to market fungicides. So, did the experts overreact in 2005? I say, "absolutely not!"

States were prepared to handle an epidemic of soybean rust in 2005, which is no small feat. Tremendous effort was put into training crop advisors, soybean producers, and agricultural agencies in the recognition, treatment and potential impact of this disease. The fact that soybean rust was not a significant issue simply gives the soybean industry another year to prepare for the inevitable.

ASR wasn't a major problem in 2005 because there was not an abundance of inoculum (viable spores). The freeze over the winter months nearly eradicated ASR from the United States, and the environmental conditions in both the Southeast and Midwest were not conducive to the build-up of inoculum.

This incredible undertaking – preparing for ASR – delivered residual benefits that will help producers and the soybean industry for years to come:

We are ready. We have a system that can confirm ASR's presence within 48 hours. From the trained observers and soybean-checkoff sponsored Sentinel plots to the USDA diagnostic facilities, all work together to bring unparalleled accuracy and speed to ASR detection.

Ample reaction time. ASR was found on either kudzu or Sentinel plots weeks before appearing in any commercial field, thus affording producers the chance to manage ASR in a timely manner.

Awareness is high. Through the public and private sector's educational efforts and the work of the agricultural media and soybean checkoff boards, no producer should be at a loss for information on ASR. This was not the case in Brazil, even during the second year of the disease there.

Knowing your crop better. Increased crop scouting allowed producers to detect and manage other pests and diseases, saving yield and profit potential.

Thankfully we didn't see an outbreak of ASR but, based on these benefits alone, the hope for the future far outweighs any perceived hype surrounding how we prepared for ASR.



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