



David's Desk

*An update on soybean health issues from
David Wright, Ph.D., NCSRP Director of Research*

Finding the 'sweet spot'

Seed costs are going through the roof, fertilizer prices are all over the map, and seed treatments are often automatically included in the seed price. This is causing many soybean growers to wonder: Where's the "sweet spot" now? What's the perfect combination of seeding rate and planting date?

Fewer seeds, earlier planting

When it comes to seeding rates, fewer is usually better. Obviously, your ideal rate depends on equipment (and who's driving), soil type, seedbed condition and tillage system.

If you've got a good planter that gives you uniform seed placement and depth, and you're not pushing the early planting envelope, you probably want to aim for the 150,000 to 160,000 live seed range. If you're drilling beans in cold, muddy conditions, you'll be at the higher 190,000 range. The goal is a final plant stand of 120,000.

Given the price of seed, research agronomists have been recommending against planting extra seed as insurance. And soybean growers already have been cautiously dropping seeding rates.

A majority of growers are also planting one to three weeks earlier than they did a decade ago, and research suggests that's beneficial, too. Late April to mid-May is normally the most favorable planting time.

However, putting seed into a cooler, wetter environment delays

emergence and subjects seed to more stress. That's where seed treatments play a role.

We're seeing more growers use treated seed and drop the seeding rate. Historically, university research has shown that, in general, seed treatments don't pay. But the economics are changing, as seed treatments are being rolled into the price of seed and growers are planting earlier.

Agronomy 101

Given phosphorus and potassium costs, growers may also be considering backing down on nutrient applications this spring. Just keep in mind that you still get paid based on yield. If you're below optimal levels of P and K, this isn't the year to skimp. Just as you shouldn't sell your whole crop at one time to spread your risk, some agronomists are suggesting that you also spread out fertilizer purchases.

For growers looking at returning to conventional soybeans, there are some viable options available. (In fact, some seed dealers already are out of non-GMO varieties.) Don't forget that conventional beans require more intensive management. You have to be diligent in making timely weed control applications.

Lastly, a reminder: Studies show optimal seeding depth is between .75- and 1.25-inches. Resist the urge to go deeper, especially if you're planting earlier.

**That's your soybean checkoff.
Delivering results.**

