



David Wright, Ph.D.
Plant Health Initiative Coordinator

Soybean Checkoff Leading the Battle Against Soybean Rust

USDA and university scientists met in Baltimore, Md. recently in a giant step forward in the battle against Asian soybean rust (ASR). More than 100 scientists met at the national Strategic Planning Session for Integrated Soybean Rust Research, sponsored by the North Central Soybean Research Program and the United Soybean Board, to outline the critical research needed to find short and long-term solutions to ASR.

Now that ASR is in the United States, a widespread, yet focused, research program can be initiated. Universities across the United States have a lot of very good scientists that need to be doing rust research. Before November 10, 2004 the only location in the United States where rust research could occur was Fort Detrick, Md., agriculture's only active BioSecurity, Level-3 containment facility.

However, not everyone who wants to conduct research on rust will be able to do so. Research team leaders will be predetermined and the teams will likely consist of a combination of USDA and university scientists. It is very important to soybean producers that the right mix of scientists be involved; those who have proven track records in solving critical problems. These teams realize that a genetic solution to ASR must be found in five years, and commercial product available to producers in ten.

One of the critical needs identified so far has been the need for an Advanced Warning Network to monitor movement of rust spores and inform soybean producers when to start spraying. Knowing when and what to spray will be the soybean producers' best tool to maintain profitability. Soybeans are no longer a low management crop.

You may hear your local university extension specialist or checkoff leader talk about "sentinel plots" as a tool to monitor for the presence of ASR. A "sentinel plot" can be many things; an early-planted plot of a susceptible crop like soybean or lima bean or it can simply be an existing field of commodity soybean that is monitored regularly. The key to an effective sentinel system is regimented monitoring regardless of what the crop is or how big the "plot" might be. Sentinel plots must be diligently monitored every two to three days to be useful to soybean producers. And, the



information must be available to producers in "real time," not just in weekly updates during the growing season.

The soybean checkoff, led by the North Central Soybean Research Program and the United Soybean Board, have partnered with university extension personnel and United States Department of Agriculture-Agriculture Research Service and -Animal Plant Health Inspection Service to help design and build this one-of-a-kind Advance Warning Network. During this effort the USDA has responded in every way to help protect the viability of the soybean producer. They have provided the leadership and funding to make this all happen.

Ultimately, the Extension programs at the Land Grant universities will determine the success of the entire Advance Warning Network. It is this group that will provide the eyes to monitor the sentinel plots and ensure each state is communicating with other states in the network. State checkoff and association boards should provide the leadership to ensure that state governments are acutely aware of the need for the additional resources it will take to ensure the success of this program.

For the latest information on soybean rust or other yield limiting diseases, access www.planthealth.info.