

Crops

Maximize yield for 2015

By WILLIE VOGT

GROWERS are looking at a different crop season than they were just a year ago, with prices softer but costs associated with production hanging on.

In a season with lower prices, Shawn Conley says, “There are some areas for

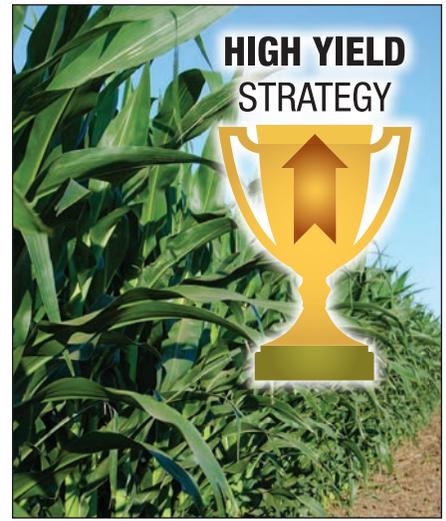
growers to cut input costs, and there are areas where they should not.” Conley is a University of Wisconsin-Madison agronomist who focuses on soybean yield.

“There’s one place with soybeans you can cut — seeding rate,” he says. “It’s an option today since most producers are overseeding soybeans.” He explains that if you plant early in the season in northern

areas, population can be set to about 140,000 seeds per acre. If you plant later in the season, you should increase the rate to about 180,000 seeds per acre.

“To maximize yield, you should aim to have full canopy cover by the R1 stage. I try to push growers to plant a little earlier, use narrow rows and get good weed control.”

That last tactic is important and calls



for use of a preemerg herbicide. Conley notes that this gets the crop off to a clean start with little or no competition from weeds. Also, if you’re planning a post-emergence application of glyphosate, you’ll have much more flexibility of timing because of that residual working for you.

Fred Below, a University of Illinois plant physiologist, focuses on high-yield production in his research work, but doesn’t claim to be a weed scientist in advising weed control. His strategy for high-yield plots: “We don’t want the weeds there. The higher the potential yield level, the higher the damage from early-season weeds.”

Inputs and yield

Conley adds that for top yield, planting in a timely manner — without mudding in the crop — can add bushels, too. Noting that after May 10 you lose 0.4 bushel per acre per day, the earlier you plant, you’re getting “free yield,” he says.

There’s a concern that farmers will cut back on nutrients. Both Conley and Below have found nutrient support is key to higher yields. Ross Bender, a graduate student working with Below at U of I, says farmers have to ask themselves if they’re going to “cut, cut, cut, or employ the agronomic management in a controlled approach. One we see that’s the foundation of high yield in corn and soybeans is adequate nutrient availability.”

For corn, that means nitrogen available when the crop needs it, which is one factor driving the move toward more later-season applications. For soybeans, keeping phosphorus and potassium in the mix is important. “A lot of farmers apply P and K as part of the previous year’s corn crop to save on application,” Bender says. “In our trials, applying P and K for soybeans for the current season can impact yield.”

Conley agrees. “Do not cut K,” he notes. “If you cut fertilizer, it’s a double-whammy. Basically, you don’t have enough nutrition out there. For the most part, that’s not a cost — it’s an investment.”

Below and Conley take different approaches when it comes to in-season crop issues. Below has long been a proponent of timely use of fungicide and insecticide as part of a high-yield strategy. For Conley, who calls himself an “IPM’er,” the answer is application in-season to combat known problems. The key for both is use of the right product at the proper timing.

As Bender points out: “When prices are high, yield is a luxury; when prices are low, yield is a necessity.”



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