

CROPS

Experts question fewer corn options

By DUANE DAILEY

WANT it or not, seed corn comes with pest protectors this year. Built-in transgenic defenses and seed treatments will come with most corn available this spring, say University of Missouri Extension specialists.

"The biggest story of the season is the new varieties with built-in technology," says Bill Wiebold, MU agronomist.

The most frequent question asked of MU entomologist Wayne Bailey is: Can I buy seed without it? "I don't think you can, unless you order organic seed," he responds. "On the negative side, that runs up the cost of seed."

Kevin Bradley, MU weed scientist, agrees. "We're moving to more Roundup Ready corn, and it will be stacked with insect protection — and there's not much other choice," he says.

Wiebold calls it an "unfortunate situation." He adds, "I can understand the

Key Points

- Built-in technology is now the industry's seed corn standard.
- MU scientists believe stacked-trait seed corn limits farmer choices.
- Field scouting for pests is advised even with added technology in corn.

company side. Their inventory just balloons with so many traits available." What was one hybrid can become nine or more by adding mixes of new traits.

"Our philosophy has been to not deploy new technology until it is needed," Wiebold says. "But, philosophy doesn't always win."

Step up scouting

Added technology doesn't eliminate the need for scouting cornfields for pests and disease. In fact, scouting may be more important than ever, the MU specialists say.

"Seed treatments will solve some problems, but they won't protect again heavy infestations," Bailey says. Likewise, transgenic *Bt* technology protects against some rootworms and moth pests, such as corn borers. However, black cutworm was the biggest problem for growers in the northeast quarter of Missouri last year. Bailey says we're still a year or two away from transgenic control for that one. Scouting will be required "to find what is out there."

Chemically coated seed treatment helps some against grubs. But Bailey sees potentially bigger problems next season. "We've seen grubs take out wheat fields this fall, and they are thick in turf grasses," he says. "They are out there, many with life cycles of two or three years."

More than 200 species of white grubs are found in Missouri, including Japanese beetles that caused problems in corn across the state last summer after being mostly in eastern Missouri for several years.

"With Japanese beetles, a lot depends on the emergence in June and July," Bailey says. "If they come out during silking, then we have damage. If they emerge before or after silking, then we get only minor leaf feeding."

Again, the theme is scouting for problems and spraying only when needed. Protected seed will head off many insect problems, Bailey notes, but black cutworms and white grubs remain the biggest challenge in 2008.

Weed protection

On the weed side, Bradley sees more management needed as the future brings more Roundup Ready corn following Roundup Ready soybeans. "With continuous Roundup Ready, selection of other herbicides becomes critical. The big issue will be resistant weeds," Bradley says.

On the bright side, Laudis, a herbicide with a new active ingredient (not a new mode of action) will be available. "It's always good to have something new on the market," Bradley notes. "Competition affects price of other herbicides."

Also new is Halex, which includes glyphosate packaged with a mix of re-



sidual herbicides for one-pass application. "The idea is to spray when weeds are 3 to 4 inches tall, to kill the weeds, and lay down a residual to take care of weeds that come up later," Bradley says. Even with new treatments, he recommends adding atrazine in most situations for weeds common to Missouri and to head off resistance.

Challenges ahead

Wiebold sees continued concern with corn-on-corn planting in the year ahead. "Just realize there can be up to 15% drop in yield in the first year of corn following corn," Wiebold says. "There's not much you can do. Extra nitrogen really doesn't help."

A loss of 10% to 12% may not seem like much, but if corn is \$4 a bushel, yield loss always makes a difference. "The margin is getting tighter with higher input costs, including rising land rental. Add a little decline in price, that margin becomes important," Wiebold adds.

Also of concern is that some tillage may help yields. "Be careful with tillage," Wiebold stresses. "Stalk residue should cover 30% to 50% of the soil surface. We don't want to go back where we were No. 2 in topsoil loss in the nation."

The specialists will be discussing these issues and research updates in depth during winter meetings.



SENSIBLE SCIENCE: Bill Wiebold, MU Extension agronomist, has always abided by the crop science philosophy of "not deploying new technology until it is needed." He questions the overuse of stacked-trait seed corn today.

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