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FLYING LOW: Thanks to products like Quilt, Headline and Stratego, fungicide application now makes up 60% of Curless Flying Service's business. In total, aerial applicators covered 4 million acres in Illinois last year.



PHOTO CREDIT: DAVID MCNERSE

Fungicide strategy

By **HOLLY SPANGLER**

THE stories run the gamut of yield response: One farmer uses fungicide and claims he got a 50-bushel yield response. Another guy down the road sprayed and made just enough to pay for the application. One expert says to lock in your fungicide acres now; the next says to scout and see.

The truth, say experts on both sides, is somewhere in the middle. University of Illinois pa-

Key Points

- Higher disease pressure makes for better fungicide response.
- Spray higher-risk fields: corn on corn, low-lying, disease-prone.
- Book aerial applicators early; cancel if they're not needed.

thologist Carl Bradley has spent several years collecting and documenting yield response to fungicide use. He's also joined forces with his counterparts

across the Midwest, compiling an unbiased set of data.

His take-home from last year? "We got the biggest fungicide response where disease pressure was highest.

"You're less likely to get a response by spraying every field. When you target areas that have disease, you'll be more likely to get a bigger return, and get the money out of your fungicide."

Bradley recommends treating those fields at higher risk for disease: corn on corn, or

racehorse hybrids with higher disease susceptibility. Consider, too, those fields that tend to retain moisture, or those fields that will be harvested later and will need to stand longer.

Plan now, cancel later

Producers can also save application dollars by preplanning. Joe Curless, of Curless Flying Service, says farmers can book acres with their retailers or aerial applicators in May, then cancel if in-season scouting re-

veals no disease pressure. "If you wait until the last minute to book, it'll cost more, and you'll be on a waiting list. And you may not get sprayed," Curless says. Preplanning helps applicators prepare for the season, he adds, and can give producers more flexibility in treating their crop.

■ **For more on fungicide plot data, aerial application and observations from '08, see pages 4 and 5.**

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