

Crops

Bumper crop lowers cottonseed prices

DESPITE a marathon hurricane season that threatened to damage the U.S. cotton crop just months ago, 2005 crop production and yields are trying to break last year's record, pushing current cottonseed prices to historical lows, experts say.

"We were uncertain how the hurricanes that tore through the southeastern U.S. this fall would affect yields," says Tom Wedegaertner, director of cottonseed research and marketing, Cotton Incorporated. "However, USDA reports reveal that yields nationally are expected to average 813 pounds per acre, up 16 pounds from November to December, but down 42 pounds from 2004." These figures have forecasters weighing in 2005 year-end cotton yields at 23.2 million bales — second only to the record 23.3 million-bale crop produced in 2004.

According to Larry Johnson of Cottonseed LLC, La Crosse, Wis., the nearby market has seen considerable downward pressure because of trans-

Key Points

- Bumper cotton crop expected to be just under 2004 record level.
- Cottonseed prices challenged by slow transportation, back-to-back big crops.
- Empty silos and bags provide extra storage for dairy producers.

portation shortfalls, two record crops in a row, and a fast-paced harvest due to great weather conditions.

"Overall, the market has a lot of work to do to get through the large amount of cottonseed and will struggle to push prices upward," he says. "Dairies need to add positions and continue to buy when the market is low."

Ryan Keller of Kelland Registered Holsteins, a 330-cow dairy farm in Richland Center, Wis., says using a vacant silo helped him average down his pricing of whole fuzzy cottonseed.

"We've definitely increased efficiency in our dairy operation by utilizing our 55-foot concrete stave silo to store a

seven-month supply of whole cottonseed," he says. "The silo holds 168 to 170 tons, allowing us a better volume price discount, while also reducing the amount of on-farm deliveries from once or twice a week to once every seven months."

Don Gaspar of Santa Fe Trail Dairy, a 6,000-cow dairy in Ulysses, Kan., says he is a "huge fan" of bagging cottonseed — a feedstuff he "wouldn't do without" because of the fiber. "Bagging is the best storage method to ensure quality and lack of shrinkage, unless you own a commodity shed."

In 2004, the operation bagged 3,000 tons of the feedstuff. Last year, Gaspar says they did not bag cottonseed due to wet weather. "When it rains in western Kansas, the ground gets really muddy and getting to the bags is problematic,"



he explains. They plan on putting in asphalt later this year or early next year to create a dry foundation for the bags.

"When it comes to ensuring quality and feed consistency, you can't beat the bag," he adds.

Cottonseed is an excellent and economical source of fiber, protein and energy. Typical rations include up to 15% cottonseed on a dry-matter basis.

For more information on cottonseed, including reports on market conditions, feeding information and a list of suppliers, visit www.cottoninc.com.

Do foliar fungicides help soybeans?

By RYAN MILLER AND DEAN MALVICK

MANY growers used foliar fungicides on soybeans in 2005. There were many anecdotal reports of yield gains. Those reports have piqued grower interest in foliar fungicides, and many will consider trying them in 2006.

However, a word of caution must be offered about these anecdotal reports. We often hear about the positive responses from the latest input, but what about all of the neutral or negative yield responses?

Mechanism behind yield gain

The reasons often cited for increases in yield are protection from plant diseases, increases in plant-growth efficiencies, and increases in stress tolerance. There are many foliar diseases in Minnesota



Key Points

- Anecdotal reports highlight yield gains with foliar fungicides.
- Economic returns are inconsistent with foliar fungicide trials.
- Growth efficiency and stress tolerance boost bean yields.

that can infect soybeans. It is believed that the majority of these diseases usually have minimal or uneconomic impacts on soybean yield. Some diseases, such as Septoria brown spot, may be controlled with foliar fungicides.

Increases in plant-growth efficiencies and stress tolerance appear to be associated primarily with the strobilurin fungicides. Increases in plant-growth efficiencies are thought to be due in part to inhibition of respiration and increases in stress tolerance. It is believed that some combination of these mechanisms is responsible for positive yield responses.

Foliar fungicides, yield response

Crop-management decisions based on anecdotal evidence are often costly, and decisions with substantial economic risk are best based on results from replicated research trials.

Data from replicated foliar fungicide trials conducted at 65 locations across the north-central region of the United States indicate applications of strobilurins (Headline, Quadris) had a positive economic return about a third of the time. However, a third of the time they had positive effects on yield but were below an economic return, and a third of the time they were associated with a yield loss.

In the same set of experiments, triazole fungicides (Folicur, Laredo,

Domark, Tilt) resulted in an economic return about a quarter of the time.

Application concerns

Application and misapplication of fungicides have the potential to cause crop injury. However, it is difficult to quantify the impact of this sort of crop injury.

Application of fungicides can also have negative impacts on beneficial entomopathogenic fungi. EF are known to play a role in reducing soybean aphid populations.

Finally, there is the threat of developing fungicide resistance from the overuse of fungicide products, and there is the possibility of creating some other unintended environmental impact. Fungicide labels should be consulted prior to application to help reduce the risk of unintended consequences.

The bottom line

Foliar fungicides potentially provide an opportunity to increase soybean yield through protection from plant diseases, increases in plant-growth efficiencies, and increases in stress tolerance under some conditions. Much work is under way and is planned to understand when and where economically positive benefits from foliar fungicide use on soybeans are most likely to occur.

Unfortunately, the inconsistent results from fungicide trials make it difficult to successfully implement a foliar fungicide program that reliably improves yields in Minnesota. Even with the threat of Asian soybean rust, the inconsistency of soybean yield response to foliar fungicides makes their use an economically risky proposition.

Miller is a regional Extension educator in crops. Malvick is an Extension plant pathologist at the University of Minnesota.

Small corn-planting window challenges Minnesota growers

TIMELY planting of corn is a pervasive problem for growers, according to the results of a survey of 13,250 U.S. corn farmers.

Nationally, nearly one in three corn plantings (32%) over the past five years was not finished by the grower's preferred completion date, with wet soil conditions the primary cause, according to the survey sponsored by Landec Ag. In 2005, 25% didn't finish their planting operations by the preferred date.

In Minnesota, 26% of 1,200 respondents said their planting was delayed beyond their preferred deadline in 2005. During the past five years, about one in every four corn plantings was not completed by the Minnesota grower's preferred end date.

The survey asked growers about their preferred planting dates and windows, timely planting success in 2005 and during the previous four years, perceived barriers to timely planting, experience with replanting due to chilling injury, and interest in earlier planting.

Overall, corn growers have a narrow planting window. Nearly 60% would like to finish planting corn in three weeks or less, while the goal for one out of six is even tighter — 10 days or less. In Minnesota, two-thirds of farmers said their goal is to complete their corn planting between May 1 and May 10.

Growers blamed planting delays on wet soil conditions caused mainly by rains in early spring. About 10% of those polled mentioned soil conditions too cold for planting.

The five-year success rate ranged from a high of 73% in Iowa, Minnesota and Nebraska to a low of 59% in Ohio.