

Check fields now for disease worries

By WILLIE VOGT

EVERY planting season is its own story with a specific dramatic theme. For 2009, the theme is soggy. And as your crop hits the best days of summer in July, chances are you could be dealing with issues you haven't seen in some time — including diseases.

Team a disease infestation with a crop that's a few days behind and you could be whipping up a recipe for disaster. Of course, that depends on a range of issues as Bob Nielsen, Extension agronomist, Purdue University, notes.

"There are risk factors to consider when looking at fields for disease pressure," he notes. "If you have a field that's late-planted and it's corn following corn and it's no-till and it's a susceptible hybrid, that's a high-risk field."

The corollary is that a field with a resistant hybrid that's not in a corn-corn rotation may be in a better position if disease pressure remains high into tasseling.

"You have to prioritize the fields you're going to scout," Nielsen adds. "Gray leaf spot is a serious disease, but — at least in Indiana — it is not a perennially severe disease."

That's where scouting comes in, and while larger farms and

Key Points

- Late-planted corn could be stressed more by disease.
- Prioritize fields when scouting time arrives.
- Scheduling application early is an important decision.

few laborers make scouting a challenge, in a year where corn may have been planted two weeks late (or worse), the chances for loss mount up if diseases appear.

Check the weather

Another issue to consider, if scouting turns up a few lesions on corn, is the forecast. "If the weather is going to be dry, the disease may not develop further," says Emerson Nafziger, Extension specialist, University of Illinois.

The challenges growers will face this month are determining the value of the crop in the field and what they can do to protect all the yield they can get from it.

Nafziger notes that if you're faced with a drought-stricken field (hard to believe after such a wet spring) that might barely make 100 bushels, adding more inputs may not be the best choice.

However, if you have a good stand and a variety susceptible

to disease, protecting the investment may become more important. There has been evidence of a yield increase if a fungicide is applied to corn. The university community looking at the data sees the most response when there's disease pressure on the fields, which can ramp up the payback for your operation.

Nielsen notes that late-planted corn could be a week, or more, behind when gray leaf spot "season" hits. If you're tagged by the disease, timely treatment of a crop that's less mature will help protect that yield.

In a season like 2009, keeping your options open will be important. Nielsen says there could be some interesting issues this year, especially for aerial application.

"Farmers can say 'no' when it comes down to it, but they're encouraged to sign up for application, so they're on the list when the time arrives," Nielsen says.

"If you're not seeing disease the week the applicator is in your county, what do you do?" he asks.

"That's an extremely tough question to answer; these fungicides offer protection for only a few weeks," he says. "Or if disease doesn't develop, did you waste your money? None of us have a good answer for that question."

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KEEPING IT GREEN: A wet planting season may have set your crop back for 2009, which could make a disease outbreak all that more costly. Consider your protection options carefully.

Checklist sets scouting priorities

If you have a lot of corn that might need scouting, there are ways to prioritize. If your fields have more than two of the factors listed below, move them to the head of the scouting list this month.

- ✓ late-planted corn
- ✓ corn following corn
- ✓ no-till corn
- ✓ hybrid that is known to be susceptible to gray leaf spot or another corn disease

Networking to cover skies

AIRCRAFT applying fungicides over Midwest fields are becoming a more common sight. Since the "organized chaos" of 2007, when fungicide applications in corn became popular, the aerial application industry is working hard to cover the territory. But how does that work?

Andrew Moore, executive director, National Agricultural Aviation Association, comments that for the 2008 season, the industry put together a much more organized approach. "Pilots did a better job of working with state agencies in advance to

get licensed before application season," he says. "And that's happened again ahead of the 2009 season."

Moore notes there are more than 4,000 aircraft out there available to apply, and this is a truly mobile workforce. "I think pilots and operators in other parts of the country have heard about this work [in the Midwest] and they're moving to it," he adds.

He notes, for example, that a pilot treating rice in Arkansas will have little to do by July and could move north to spray corn with fungicides. "Aerial application has become a kind of

itinerate industry. We migrate," Moore notes.

He adds, however, that to make sure you get coverage if disease strikes, you should contact your local aerial application operation. Let them know the acreage you might need to have sprayed, so they can plan to have the equipment on hand. "Our association members are networking a lot more to make sure they have the equipment they need at application time," he concludes.

■ You can learn more by visiting www.agaviation.org.

