

Stay vigilant about Asian rust

By WILLIE VOGT

AS the 2006 soybean season winds down, growers from the Delta to the Dakotas are breathing a sigh of relief. Sure, soybean rust appeared in some areas, and there were some developments on the rust front, but 2006 has turned into another quiet year for this disease. In fact, it may have been too quiet.

Plant pathologists in some circles worry that with all of the 2005 warnings

Key Points

- Dry weather helped keep soybean rust at bay in 2006.
- Growers need a plan to tackle an outbreak of the disease.
- Lack of rust this year does not mean trouble won't strike in the future.

and two seasons without rust moving beyond a confined area in time to do serious crop damage, farmers might

get complacent. "I'm worried that some growers might ignore that threat next year," says Monte Miles, USDA Agricultural Research Service research plant pathologist. "Farmers have to keep vigilant on this issue."

Miles recommends growers take the following actions:

- Know which fungicides you will use. "You don't need to have them on hand, but you should know what products will work for you," he says.

- Look at Web sites or talk with crop



Extension sources to know the best fungicides for your crop in a specific situation. "You have to know how much risk you're willing to accept if the problem arises," Miles says.

- Contact your crop consultant or Extension resource if they're going to tell you when to spray. Those lines of communication need to remain open.

Dry weather helped

Rust didn't race too far north in time to slam soybean yields this year in part due to the Southern drought.

Dry weather kept rust from spreading, but when the rains started in midsummer in Louisiana, for example, rust appeared. That shows there's a spore population out there waiting for the right conditions.

Miles notes that researchers are still learning about how long spores can remain viable in the environment. While they need green tissue to reproduce, spores may lay dormant in the environment for some time.

As for 2006, don't count on a repeat next year. "Southern pathologists will tell you, however, that the weather the South experienced this year was atypical," Miles says. "Usually the weather is wet early, with a midsummer dry period. That could happen next year, and there is a spore population in the South now."

Brazil, often the reference for rust, has weather conditions that differ quite a bit from the United States; thus, some soybean observers point to another country as a guide: Argentina. Rust outbreaks there are more directly related to weather conditions including adequate moisture and cooler temperatures.

Rain paid off

As for the 2006 crop in general, top-producing fields are going to have one common factor: rain.

"Where we've had rain, we're going to get good yields," says Melvin Newman, University of Tennessee plant pathologist. "We've had some troubles with other diseases like frogeye leaf spot, but it appeared to be less aggressive this year [in the South]."

He notes that farmers in the South and Mid-South often spray a little late for these diseases, but that may have offered a better return this year with the later onset of some crop diseases. "A lot of growers are learning that timely spraying can really pay off," he notes.

As for the rust popping up in the South, Newman says most of the crop is past a time when it will see a yield hit if rust spreads further. "We've got the crop we're going to get," he adds.

Miles says he expects rust to spread farther this winter — perhaps as far as Missouri — by November. "But it will be too late to do any damage," he adds.



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