

Cotton, beans share invisible pest



Cotton Focus

By PAM GOLDEN

WHEN soybeans were cheap, no growers put their cotton crop at risk by rotating with them.

In this year of record-breaking soybean prices, however, all bets are off.

"Now it makes economic sense, and there are tools we can use to make it

Key Points

- Cotton and soybeans are susceptible to the same types of nematodes.
- Nematode-resistant soybean varieties are essential when rotating with cotton.
- Balance convenience with profit opportunity in treatment decision.

successful," says Georgia Extension pathologist Bob Kemerait.

The first step to using those tools to ensure profit is to treat for negative crop

interactions. One of those, of course, is nematodes. Soybeans and cotton both are susceptible to root-knot, reniform and Southern lance nematodes.

That said, the best way to manage nematodes is through rotation. When price trumps rotation, however, look to variety selection and chemical treatments to overcome a bad nematode rotation.

"First, look for a resistant variety," Kemerait says, noting nematode resistance is limited in cotton varieties but readily available in soybean. "Also, be

aware of your nematode populations and treat appropriately."

The definition of appropriate can be slippery in these days of seed, soil and foliar treatments for these nearly invisible yield thieves.

"The question I have with seed treatments is how do I identify the fields where they work and where they belong?" Kemerait says. "Any treatment can look bad or good in certain circumstances."

As a general rule, Kemerait says, use seed treatments in low-pressure fields. Thresholds vary by state — and by soil type — so check with the local Extension agent for the best definition of low pressure in your area.

In a moderate- or high-pressure field, use either a liquid or granular treatment plus a seed treatment or a fumigant, Kemerait says.

"I feel very comfortable with fumigants. The problem is the ease putting it out," he says. "A fumigant, when applied properly, does increase the value of the field."

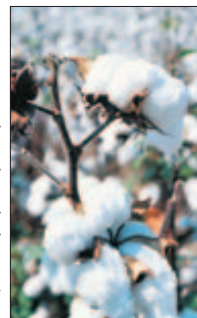
In a low-pressure field, Kemerait says, figuring the treatment cost against a yield increase, a seed treatment offers a slight profit advantage; a fumigant offers a high-profit opportunity. In a high-pressure field, he says, a grower takes a loss with a seed treatment alone and gains profit with a fumigant.

For growers who aren't comfortable with fumigants or don't have the equipment available to apply them, Kemerait suggests using a liquid or granular application plus a seed treatment to balance convenience with profit.

Texas A&M University Extension pathologist Jason Woodward also points out that managing nematodes lessens disease later in the season.

"While the nematode management directly increases yields, indirect benefits can also be observed," Woodward says. "For example, reducing the amount of damage nematodes cause on cotton roots will indirectly reduce the frequency of fungal pathogens such as *Fusarium oxysporum* f. sp. *vasinfectum* and *Thielaviopsis basicola*."

That's commonly called fusarium wilt and black root rot — both commonly despised by the cotton producer.



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