

Full-season drilled beans offer top yield potential

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GEORGETOWN, Del. — A lot of experimenting is going on right now with cultural practices for soybeans, with an eye toward improving yields.

One technique gaining popularity on Delmarva is full-season drilled beans.

The yield potential is probably greater with this than with any other cropping method now recommended, says University of Delaware extension agronomy specialist Frank Webb. But, he warns, management of this planting system must be very keen because there's no room for error. Once your beans are in, you're very limited in what you can do to correct any mistakes.

Currently Webb is looking at an even newer approach

to soybean farming — full-season, no-till. This system involves planting soybeans into a cover crop or crop residue without any prior tillage. In this sense the method resembles that used for no-till corn production.

The specialist isn't recommending this approach yet for soybeans. But for the past two years he's been evaluating soybean response to various tillage alternatives, along with irrigation, row spacing and cover crops in an extension demonstration on the University Substation farm near Georgetown.

The results should make it easier to develop an effective no-till program for full-season beans.

The demonstration in-

cludes conventional tillage, in-row subsoiling on conventionally prepared ground, and no-tillage plantings of full-season beans.

Yields are being compared from 10, 15, and 30 inch row spacings in both the conventional and no-till plantings. The subsoiling treatments are all in 30 inch rows because the subsoiling practice does not lend itself to close row spacing.

Another part of the demonstration compares the effects of cover crops on yield in both conventional and no-till beans.

Covers include vetch, rye, Austrian winter peas, crimson clover, and arrowleaf clover. Soybeans are planted directly in these covers, as well as in rotation after corn planted in a cover crop.

So far there has been no soybean yield response to direct planting in a cover under any of the tillage or row spacing treatments, reports Webb. In 1978 and 1979 both conventional and no-till beans averaged about 35 bushels an acre.

Subsoiling 16 inches directly beneath the row resulted in an increase of 4 to 5 bushels per acre.

No-till yields in the demonstration appear to be closely related to row-spacing. In 10-inch rows, no-tillage soybeans yielded 40 bushels an acre; in 15-inch rows, 36 bushels; and in 30-inch rows, only 33 bushels.

This suggests that closing up rows as much as possible can lead to a big improvement in yield, says Webb.

He also notes that the closer the row spacing, the less weed pressure there was.

"We're not ready yet to advocate a switch to full-season, no-till soybeans," he says.

With only two years' results to go on there's still a lot of work to be done. But before long he hopes to be able to come up with some recommendations.

"For the present," he says, "I would advise anyone who's thinking of trying this approach to get in touch with your county agent for the latest information available."

He also suggests that growers interested in the effects of row spacing on soybean yield attend the upcoming Delmarva Soybean Meeting, Thursday, February 14, from 8:30 a.m. to 3:15 p.m. at Convention Hall in Ocean City, Md. One of the speakers at that meeting will be James Dunphy of North Carolina State University. A soybean production specialist, he will talk on "Soybean Row Spacing and Plant Interaction."

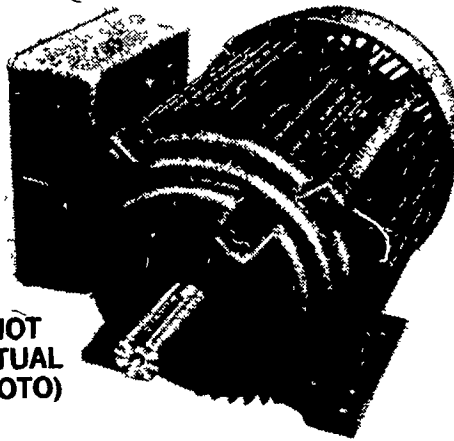
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Sparks wins grant to improve corn yields

NEWARK — Dr. Donald L. Sparks, department of plant science, University of Delaware, has received a \$15,000 competitive grant from the Potash and Phosphate Institute, Washington, D.C., to study boron and potassium fer-

tilization and leaching in sandy soils.

According to Dr. Charles R. Curtis, chairperson of the department of plant science, Dr. Sparks is a recent faculty addition who will carry teaching and research duties in the area of soil chemistry.

The three-year project will involve field studies and basic laboratory research conducted at the Delaware Agricultural Experiment Station to determine the amount of leaching of applied boron and potassium.

Other objectives of the research are to study the leaching effect on corn yields, in addition to investigating the influence of irrigation and application methods on the response of field corn to boron and potassium.

The research is important because sandy soils have little capacity to retain applied boron and potassium. Sparks' study will attempt to determine the rates of boron and potassium fertilizers needed to maximize corn yields under intense management situations—those involving irrigation and high plant populations.

The development of this knowledge may be useful in helping farmers attain higher corn yields.

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