

Narrower rows may be key to higher wheat yields

BY DICK ANGLESTEIN
LANDISVILLE — Planting in narrower rows may be the most obvious key to higher wheat yields, according to a wheat management study now in its third year under the auspices of the USDA and Penn State's Center for Cereal Research.

Findings from the first two years of the study were among information outlined at a recent Small Grains Field Day held at Penn State's Southeast Research Laboratory at Landisville.

Wheat yield increases averaged some 8.5 bushels an acre more in five-inch row plantings as compared to the normal seven-inch rows, according to Greg Roth, Penn State grad student involved in the study.

At 14 out of 15 planting locations in Lancaster and Centre County, higher wheat yields were achieved with the narrower rows, averaging nearly 15 percent more.

"There was less lodging with the five-inch rows and no more serious disease problems," Roth explained.

The only catch to the narrower

rows is that there is no drill that is made for five-inch rows. It was suggested that this is one area in which farmers may recommend equipment changes to manufacturers.

Row spacing was just one of four main variables that were included in the study. The others included varying nitrogen applications, seed depth and seeding rates.

Generally, it was found that there were no appreciable gains in yield beyond applications of 30 lbs. of N. In Lancaster County particularly, where heavy amounts of manure are spread on fields, higher applications of N were not beneficial. In fact, higher applications can decrease bushel weight and just feed certain diseases, such as Septoria.

Overall, the 150-lb. seeding rate per acre was adequate. Also, there was no significant difference in seeding depth variances from three-quarters to one and one-half inches. Uniform seed coverage is important.

Penn State pathologist J. A. Frank called this year "a good disease year but a bad grain-fill

year."

Factors such as the mild fall that permitted too-early planting and the wet spring boosted the diseases in this year's small grains.

"There is a very high incidence of barley yellow dwarf virus," Frank said.

"And, we've actually seen some dwarfing this year."

Powdery mildew was actually on plants already last fall, he said, but it had to be viewed in the laboratory in order to be seen.

"The earlier plantings last fall actually put the plants under more disease stress," Frank said.

"We've seen better results from later plantings."

Septoria was described as bad

this year; while rust was not as prevalent.

"We've looked at some barley and actually saw six different diseases on the same variety," Frank said.

Also speaking at the field day were H. G. Marshall, M. L. Risius and Elwood Hatley of the Penn State staff.



The Pa. Crop Reporting Service reports that as of this past Sunday, June 26, 25 percent of the wheat crop was turning yellow, with the southern regions reporting as high as 51 percent. Positive weather this week allowed these figures to increase, thus creating favorable harvesting conditions.



Statewide, 43 percent of the barley crop was turning yellow, 16 percent was ripe and 5 percent had been harvested, as of Sunday, June 26 - the Pa. Crop Reporting Service's latest update.

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