

Higher Profit Dryland Wheat: Get It With Fertilization

NORCROSS, Ga. — What are farmers doing to address low crop prices? Most are trying to cut costs and improve their marketing skills. Both of these strategies are important, but they must be combined with higher production levels. Selling more grain at a higher price will take a big bite out of the problem. This sounds simple, but how is it done? What are the risks?

Fertilization can increase yields. In dryland cropping areas, substantial yield increases have come from applying nitrogen and phosphorus where they are needed. The chances that yield increases will more than cover the annual costs of fertilization increase as soil nitrate levels and/or phosphorus levels decline. However, there is more to fertilization than just yield increases. Overall production levels are most important. Yields must be high enough to cover all costs of production, not just fertilizer. Soils that are managed at lower soil test levels may produce greater responses to fertilizer, but may not be capable of reaching the higher yield necessary to be profitable.

Fertilization can increase the selling price. How? Increased protein. Higher protein levels can dramatically increase the selling price. How much? Let's look at an example. Some data indicate that hard red spring wheat without fertilizer can have protein levels as low as 10 to 11 percent. When fertilized, that same wheat crop could have 14 to 15 percent protein.

What chances do you have of see-

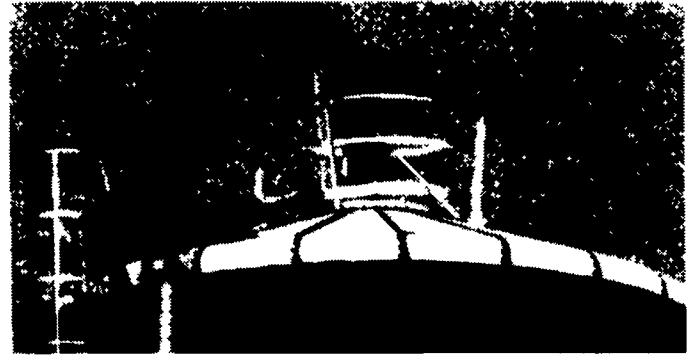
ing yield benefits from fertilization? All of us are familiar with the whims of nature that make dryland cropping so challenging; insects, diseases, and, of course, rainfall. All of the factors can increase the risk of not getting yield increases from fertilizer. You can do everything right, but if the rain doesn't come, you won't be rewarded with higher yields. But what if it turns out to be a good year? Is your fertility program going to let you cash in, or will

it produce disappointing yields? A study conducted on winter wheat in Colorado showed that in 10 out of 19 site-years, significant yield increases resulted from nitrogen fertilization. That means that fertilizing produced significantly more revenue about half of the time.

For more information, contact Dr. T. Scott Murrell, Northcentral Director, PPI, 14030 Norway Street, NW, Andover, MN 55304, (612) 755-3444. E-mail: smurrell@ppi-far.org.



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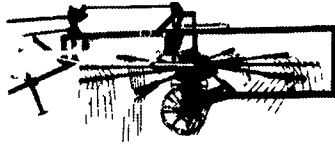
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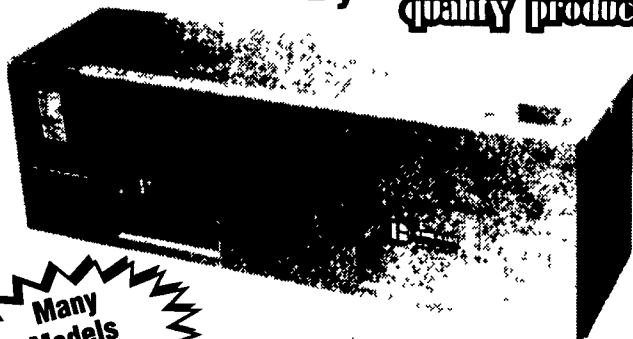
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