

11-2011

Top yields start with top varieties

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Top yields start with top varieties

Abstract

It's December and time to make seed purchases. Selecting soybean varieties is not only critical for attaining economical yields, but also a way to manage risk. It is equally as critical to have a sound strategy for seed selection as it is to have a sound strategy for marketing the expected grain you will harvest.

Disciplines

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Dec 22, 2011

Top yields start with top varieties

By MARK LICHT

It's December and time to make seed purchases. Selecting soybean varieties is not only critical for attaining economical yields, but also a way to manage risk. It is equally as critical to have a sound strategy for seed selection as it is to have a sound strategy for marketing the expected grain you will harvest.

Everyone starts out either looking at the new product catalogs or reviewing results from show plots, demonstrations or single-location replicated trials. These give a snapshot of performance at a single location under a single condition.

What's the likelihood that 2012 will look like 2011? I'm not a meteorologist, but my guess is not very good. Multi-location and/or multiyear trials will be better indicators of how sturdy a hybrid or variety will be. Another way to judge good sources of information is to look for sources that are unbiased and/or randomize

and replicate entries at many locations. One good source for this information is Iowa State University's Crop Testing program at www.croptesting.iastate.edu.

Fit variety to your field

What should you look for after finding reliable sources of trial information and have collected product catalogs? Look for seed characteristics that you feel are important to you and fit your fields. The important part of the last sentence is "important to you and fit your fields." You know your goals and your fields better than anyone else. Yes, knowledgeable seed dealers and crop consultants have a pretty good idea, but ultimately you know best.

Choose multiple soybean varieties as a way to spread your risk. Choose seed that performs well across a variety of locations and years, but don't choose seed that is identical in all other traits. Plant seed with differences in maturity, insect/disease tolerance and genetic traits. Look at planting seed from multiple companies. Different genetic packages help spread crop production risk and increase the potential of having high yields.

What should you look for?

What characteristics should you look for in soybean varieties?

- Yield, yield and more yield. How are you going to maximize yield if you don't choose seed based on yield? Products that yield poorly in trials likely will yield poorly on your fields, too. This doesn't necessarily mean picking the top three yielding varieties, but does require use of varieties that are in the top quarter.
- Choose the right maturity. Select a wide range of maturities to lengthen the harvest window. Keep planting long-season varieties, but also some that are midseason. Reserve the early-maturity choices for June planting. Using a mixture of maturity groups can help stagger physiological maturity to help minimize weather stresses and widen the harvest window.

- Look twice at insect and disease tolerance. Grow genetics that have tolerance or resistance to seedling pathogens, foliar diseases and insects that have been past problems in your fields. This requires you to know which fields are most susceptible to sudden death syndrome and which fields have the most pressure from soybean cyst nematode. Choosing varieties that have tolerance to pest pressures can be a key to attaining yield goals.
- Consider your herbicide traits and plan for weed control accordingly. Choose traits when and where they provide the needed benefits. With waterhemp, glyphosate resistance is a reality, so consider how to use glyphosate and glufosinate-resistant varieties effectively in your operation. Maybe that means not using the traits or not relying on them so heavily.
- Standability and grain composition. Taller plants are more susceptible to lodging, and yield is not correlated to plant height. If you are in the specialty soybean markets, know your market benchmarks for oil and protein content.

Licht is ISU Extension field agronomist for central Iowa, located at Nevada.

- For soybean management information, contact your area ISU Extension field agronomist.

This article published in the November, 2011 edition of WALLACES FARMER.

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