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Plant Pathology Fact Sheet

The Importance of Scouting Wheat for Plant Diseases

Donald E. Hershman
Extension Plant Pathologist

For a variety of reasons, few Kentucky wheat producers place much emphasis on scouting their wheat diseases. Time and labor constraints (for do-it-yourselfers), the cost of hiring a crop consultant, and indifference to the need for scouting rank among the top reasons why this is the case. However, scouting is essential for those interested in managing diseases using an integrated approach. First, scouting helps build an on-farm database that can be used to select appropriate disease management tactics for future crops. Second, scouting helps you make the best possible fungicide use decisions, which frequently results in the decision NOT to spray a fungicide.

Research and experience over the past 20 years suggest that fungicides are not helpful or needed in about two out of every five or six years. Low disease years are most often associated with extremely dry andhot weather following flag leaf emergence. Applying fungicides in low disease years is not only a waste of time and money, but it is also not good for the environment. Effective

crop scouting can help you avoid making unnecessary fungicide applications and will make your wheat operation more profitable and sustainable in the long haul.

Effective crop scouting does take some time, experience, and patience, but it is not that difficult. The Kentucky Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Program offers annual scout trainings, as well as multiple scouting resources. In addition, there are numerous other training opportunities held throughout the year; plus there is an inexhaustible supply of wheat disease and scouting information available on the Internet. Take advantage of

all opportunities to learn how to scout for and identify the most common wheat diseases on your farm. At first, scouting for diseases may seem like a daunting task, until you realize that only a few diseases have the potential to seriously impact crop yield, and these tend to show up at specific times during the season, not all at once. But for both common and less common disease, the University of Kentucky operates two Plant Disease Diagnostic Laboratories to help with disease identification. It is essential that pest problems be accurately identified before embarking on any pest management program, especially those that involve the use of a pesticide. For more information on submitting samples for diagnosis, contact your local county Extension office.

Additional Resources

Disease management and crop production advice can be found in the following University of Kentucky publications available at County Extension offices, as well as on the Internet.

- Comprehensive Guide to Wheat Management in Kentucky, ID-125
http://www.ca.uky.edu/agc/pubs/id/id125/id125.htm
- Kentucky Integrated Pest Management Programs (IPM)
http://www.uky.edu/Ag/IPM/ipm.htm
- Kentucky Integrated Crop Management Manual for Small Grains, IPM-4 (2009)
http://www.uky.edu/Ag/IPM/manuals/ipm4smgr.pdf
- Kentucky Plant Disease Management Guide for Small Grains, PPA-10c (1993)
http://www.ca.uky.edu/agc/pubs/ppa/ppa10c/ppa10c.pdf
- No-Till Small Grains Production in Kentucky, ID-136 (2000)
http://www.ca.uky.edu/agc/pubs/id/id136/id136.htm

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