



PERSPECTIVES

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Asian Soybean Rust Strategies

With the discovery of soybean rust in Louisiana in November, U.S. soybean farmers are faced with the reality of contending with this disease next year. Finding it at this time of the year allows us time to make some plans.

Asian soybean rust may be able to overwinter on plants in the southern areas where it was first identified, but it needs living plant material to survive on. In South America and Africa, it has been found on kudzu, sweet clover and a number of legumes. It will not be able to survive through the winter in the more northern parts of the United States.

For it to infect the 2005 soybean crop, the spores would have to be windblown from the south by next summer. When the disease spores move up, the right environmental conditions will be needed to infect the bean crop. The disease will need warm temperatures and the bean leaves need to stay wet for 6 to 8 hours after infection for the disease to get started. This is similar to leaf rust in wheat, which is blown in every spring and, if the conditions are favorable, we have an outbreak.

USDA is predicting less than a 50% chance of having a rust outbreak in Kansas for next year. Prevailing winds

from the south or southwest during the summer should blow most of the rust away from us. The lower humidity levels we have during the summer, compared to the Corn Belt, lowers our chances of having soybean rust for 2005.

We don't want to assume that we are completely safe from this problem. We need to have a strategy in mind if it does show up. Early detection is the first step. This is a

very aggressive organism and can develop into a huge problem in a matter of days. If rust is found in a field, be prepared to treat with a fungicide. Several chemicals are currently labeled and more are expected to be approved by spring. The cost, usually between \$15 and \$20 per acre, will easily pay for itself when rust is found. In South America, Asian soybean rust has caused up to 80% yield loss when left untreated.

The surest way to avoid rust is to not plant soybeans next season. However, with the odds of not having a problem in our favor, we may be able to grow soybeans more profitably in Kansas than in other parts of the country.



by **Jim Gleason**,
Regional Vice President
St. John, Kan.

Q & A

Longer Corn Rotations Don't Always Mean Lower Yields

Recent reports of the Asian soybean rust reaching as far north as southeastern Missouri have growers throughout Oklahoma and Kansas looking for alternatives to growing soybeans as a rotation crop with corn.

Crop Quest Division Manager Scott Beguelin, Silver Lake, Kan., says the answer may be continuous corn for up to three years in some parts of the region.

Q Is there a loss in corn yield if a grower plants corn a second year behind corn vs. rotating with soybeans?

A In northeast Kansas in 2004, our growers produced 173 bushels of corn per acre on a corn/corn rotation vs. 165 on a corn/soybean rotation on dryland fields. On irrigated fields, yields were about the same (207 bushels per acre). However, from an economic standpoint, corn the second or third year grossed about \$435 to \$475 per acre. For soybeans planted behind corn, growers made about \$300 to \$315 per acre. Even with the \$40 to \$50 extra production cost for corn vs. soybeans, corn following corn was better than soybeans following corn.

Q Does the same trend hold true if a grower plants corn after corn for three consecutive years?

A We don't have as much data on three-year corn rotations, but from what we have seen, yields on corn planted three years in a row are comparable to the first year of corn on irrigated fields and still slightly higher on dryland fields. Three years in corn is probably the maximum a grower can go before running into production problems.

Q Traditionally, lower yields have been expected from longer corn rotations – how do you explain the level or slightly increased yields on two- and three-year corn rotations?

A We are coming off five to six years of drought conditions throughout Kansas and northern Oklahoma. Soybeans take considerably more moisture to set pods late in the season than corn requires. I believe

in one-year corn/soybean rotations, soybeans take moisture away from the soil profile. When corn follows the next year, there is a reduction in available moisture. In irrigated fields, we see less variation in yield, because beans take less water away from the soil profile. I think the availability of moisture is the primary reason we see level or higher yields on second- and third-year corn.

Q Are seed, fertilizer and insecticide costs higher on second- and third-year corn?

A Fertilizer costs are certainly higher for corn vs. soybeans, and \$5 to \$8 per acre higher on corn following corn. The higher yields and higher value of corn easily offset this cost differential. Though corn seed costs have been higher, over 98% of our soybeans have the Roundup Ready gene, making the cost comparable to corn. In some isolated fields, we saw some increase in corn root worm buildups in second- and third-year corn, but in over 90% of our fields, the cost differential was insignificant.

Q Given the economic benefits of taking soybeans out of the rotation, are more growers going to longer corn rotations?

A Yes, we have seen a gradual increase in the number of growers who are going two and three years in corn. We haven't tracked yields beyond three years, but I suspect that might be the maximum growers should go with corn. Still, the most popular rotation is corn followed by beans. If Asian soybean rust reaches our area, I expect more growers will look for alternatives to soybeans and, from our data, corn following corn up to three years looks like a good option.



by **Scott Beguelin**,
Division Manager
Silver Lake, Kan.



Making Decisions for the Next Growing Season



by **Ron O'Hanlon, President**
Member, National Alliance of Independent
Crop Consultants, CPCC-I Certified

It is not always possible to wait until the last moment and have all the facts in place before making decisions to proceed with a plan of action. Farming can be a high-risk venture, because many decisions have to be made in advance on when the action will be implemented, such as buying products, fertilizing, planting, pre-watering, etc.

Weather plays such a critical role as to whether a farmer has a successful crop or a failure. All the right decisions can be implemented for a successful yield, but an act of Mother Nature can turn the crop into a disaster. If the farmer cannot financially handle this kind of risk, then they must have some kind of insurance to protect them. These are decisions that have to be made before disaster strikes.

There are crop choices that carry a higher risk for planting in some areas (see related story on page 4 by Dwight Koops). Yet, under the right conditions, these could be the most profitable decisions made. Again, it is important to understand the risks involved.

All the bio-technology packaged into a bag of corn seed now has the price exceeding over \$200 per bag, in some instances. This has the price of the seed being one of the more costly input decisions. Yet, to take advantage of the potential benefits of this new technology, farmers have to make the decisions to purchase the seed four to six months

in advance of when the crop will go into the ground. These decisions have to be made before the farmers know what the weather will be like in the spring and even before the actual insect situations are known. Making decisions this far in advance is not for the “faint of heart.”

Our Crop Quest agronomists have a lot of tools and knowledge available to them that farmers can use to help lessen the risk of decision making. They have a crop budgeting software program in which the agronomist can generate a crop budget analysis to look at the impact of the various products and/or operations. They can compare alternative crops to one another to see which crop has the most economic potential.

With the compiling of data across our trade territory, the agronomists can make better choices as to which products may be more efficacious or what hybrids/varieties have the greatest potential under certain parameters. Since Crop Quest agronomists have the opportunity to work with various producers throughout the year, they get the chance to build experiences in many different situations, which is beneficial to all their farmers in the decision-making process.

Be sure to visit with your Crop Quest agronomists and let them assist you in your decision making. They can help you in making better-informed decisions and also reduce the stress associated in making plans this far in advance. Not only do you have the benefit of your individual agronomist, but your Crop Quest agronomist also utilizes the experience and knowledge of the rest of the agronomic team throughout the company.



Technology Workshop Worth Attending

Crop Quest is excited to be one of the co-sponsors for the fourth annual Golden Belt Residue Management Alliance Technology School to be held February 7-8, 2005, in the Great Bend Expo Center in Great Bend, Kan.

This year's technology summit will feature guest speaker Gene Millard, host of Agri Shop®, as well as in-depth technology and training sessions including sprayer nozzle selection, proper sprayer calibration, weed identification and pesticide storage tips.

To reserve your attendance at the event, please contact Tom Humburg, GBRMA President, at 620-793-3332. We hope to see you there!

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Understanding the Risks & Rewards of Growing Cotton in Nontraditional Areas



by **Dwight Koops**,
Regional Vice President
Ulysses, Kan.

Farmers are constantly searching for opportunities to enhance their bottom line, including exploring the viability of planting nontraditional crops in their area. Sometimes these crops prove to be quite successful, and other times are met with limited success.

It is very important that producers understand all the ramifications of trying a new venture. Many times the success or failure of a nontraditional crop lies in marketing the crop. It may be very possible to grow an abundant and quality product, but if there is no market for the crop, all the agronomic success is wasted. It is also easy for niche markets to get flooded with product and cause the value of the commodity to drop to an unprofitable level.

Then there are times when crops are grown in climates that are not ideal for the plant. The current trend to plant cotton north of traditional growing areas is a perfect example of this. Cotton has been successful over the last few years as far north as southwest Kansas. The weather conditions have been very favorable for this crop that needs as many heat units as possible. The need to reduce water use has been a major factor in looking at cotton as an alternative.

In order for cotton to be successful in southwest Kansas, producers need to do their homework, and must be completely committed to growing the crop. Nontraditional crops typically do not allow for any mistakes along the way. For cotton, timing

is everything. Any delays in planting, treatments or tillage can lead to wasted growing days and cause a potential profit to turn into a net loss.

It is also important that an accurate budget is made, and to stay aware of all the costs associated with the crop. Keep in mind that new crops can require a whole new line of machinery. Whether the work is 'hired out' or machinery is purchased, fixed costs will go up.

Remember that it is possible to grow almost any crop across our trade area, but whether you can grow a crop for profit is a much different story. For instance, in far western Kansas, we can grow soybeans. But, our soils typically have not allowed us to grow high enough yields – year in and year out – to grow profitable soybeans. That does not mean we throw soybeans out of the rotation; it just means we place the crop in a situation where we can maximize our success. The same must hold true for cotton.

In the end, Mother Nature will have the most influence on the success of cotton in these 'northern climes,' and producers must be prepared to expect failures even in years of mild weather. If that risk is acceptable, cotton may have a place on your farm. This is a decision every farmer must make for their individual situation. Cotton is not a crop every farmer should grow. If you decide to grow cotton on your farm, seek the advice of your Crop Quest agronomist to help you place the cotton in the best situations for success. Our staff is trained and has excellent experience growing cotton. We understand the risks and know what it takes to be successful. But, we all feel quite powerless when Mother Nature doesn't cooperate.



Mission Statement

Crop Quest is an employee-owned company dedicated to providing the highest quality agricultural services for each customer. The quest of our network of professionals is to practice integrity and innovation to ensure our services are economically and environmentally sound.

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