How to Start the Spring Wheat Season Strong

A season is only as strong as its start, and as the new year begins, the time to start thinking about spring wheat is now. In my experience as the WestBred® Technical Product Manager for the Montana region, the highest yielding operations are the ones that began with a solid foundation. To help growers make the most of their planting season, I’ve narrowed down the top three things Montana wheat growers need to consider before planting.

1. Variety Selection

Growers should always consider yield potential when deciding which spring wheat varieties to plant. When evaluating previous yield results, be mindful not to put too much stock in a single report; always try to use multiyear and multilocation regional data to make decisions. Another way to increase yield potential is to take the time to evaluate new genetic selections before planting. Genetic advances occur often, and while planting old genetics may be convenient, comfortable and familiar, this can cost the grower bushels of production.

I always tell growers to consider the seed’s quality characteristics. For Hard Red Spring varieties, protein should be a strong focus. High protein, at least 13 percent, is a characteristic millers and bakers seek. Figure out the quality characteristics that your buyers want, and then select based on those needs.

Finally, finding a disease resistance package that is well-suited for your area is a must. In Montana, Yellow (Stripe) Rust and Fusarium Head Blight (Scab) are two main diseases that could impact wheat fields in 2017. Built-in resistance can help manage these diseases. While diseases can be prevented and managed with proper scouting and spraying, knowing the genetics of your variety will help you determine what to watch for during the season.

2. Seed Treatments

Seed treatment applications help seedlings thrive during the cold and wet Montana spring wheat planting season. I’m a big fan of seed treatments because they are successful at keeping diseases at bay until the wheat seedling establishes. Applying seed treatments containing insecticides and fungicides will ensure that seedlings are protected from a broad range of seed-borne and soil-borne diseases, as well as insects.
I often compare the use of treated seed to insurance – it protects against diseases and increases overall plant health. I suggest picking a broad-spectrum treatment with multiple modes of action that guards against multiple pathogens and insects and provides longevity and efficacy.

3. Optimal Seeding Rates

Seed size matters. Depending on the size of your seed, you could be overseeding or underseeding, both of which affect yield potential in the long run. While many wheat growers have traditionally planted based on pounds per acre, studies continue to prove planting based on a seed count per acre can improve yield and profit potential. WestBred seed suppliers can provide their growers with an Optimal Seeding Rate recommendation that takes seed count into consideration, as well as location, planting date, production practices and target seeds per acre. With this recommendation, all growers need to do is calibrate their drills and plant with confidence.

About WestBred Wheat

WestBred wheat provides seed suppliers and their growers access to the highest yield potential wheat seed, as well as testing, education, resources and experienced representatives to help maximize their yield potential.

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