

News Column

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WHEAT SEED TREATMENTS

If you search long enough, or ask enough different people, you will eventually find the answer you want. Today's question – Should I treat my seed wheat with a fungicide before planting?

Today's answer is,....maybe not. Or, it could be yes, in some situations. Or, if you want it to be definitely yes, or definitely no, I can probably find that answer for you too.

My answer for years has been that a fungicide seed treatment for wheat probably isn't necessary for your grain production fields. Now, the qualifier is that I expect your seed wheat to be grown from either certified seed, or from clean seed that you treated with a fungicide the year before.

For general grain production fields that are planted in good conditions – planted on time and into moisture – a fungicide seed treatment isn't necessary. It won't make you any more money because it won't get you any more bushels.

On the other hand, if you are growing wheat for seed, then you absolutely should use a fungicide seed treatment. Why? Because you want to control seed-borne diseases, like common bunt and smut, that can cost you in both yield and quality of grain. If you want to be absolutely certain home-grown seed wheat is free of these diseases, then seed planted on wheat seed production fields needs to be treated.

If seed-borne diseases aren't in your seed, they won't suddenly appear. However, a seed

treatment fungicide provides the assurance that you will produce clean seed, just in case you did happen to have a small amount of bunt or smut that had gone unnoticed.

Other times you might choose to use a wheat seed treatment fungicide would be when you have low germination seed caused by seed-borne Fusarium or other fungi, or when weather has delayed planting and necessitates planting into cool, wet soils.

There are a number of effective wheat seed treatment fungicides and you can study those in K-State's publication MF2955, Wheat Seed Treatment Fungicides for Wheat Disease Management 2015. Yep, it's a year old, but it's still up to date. Just Google it and look it over, or give me a call and I'll send it to you.

When you study the list of seed treatments, you'll notice that several of them also contain the systemic insecticide imidacloprid (Gaucho), and one of them contains thiamethoxam (Cruiser). What can systemic insecticides do for you? If greenbug or cherry bird oat aphid populations are high, a systemic insecticide could help control them, thus lowering the incidence of Barley Yellow Dwarf.

Now, is a systemic insecticide worth the money? Probably not. However,....research has shown a yield response as high as 20%. Yield response is inconsistent though because peak aphid populations are inconsistent. Systemic insecticides have activity that lasts about 45 days. If peak aphid populations occur more than 45 days after planting, then there likely won't be a yield response to the insecticide.

If it was my money, I'd spend it on a fungicide treatment for my seed production fields only. I wouldn't bother treating seed for just grain production, and I wouldn't bother with the systemic insecticide on any of my seed.

That's just my call though. You decide for yourself. Like I said when I started this

column, if you don't like my answer, just keep asking. Eventually you'll get the answer you want.

If you have questions, you can reach me at the Riley County Extension Office at 785/537-6350. Or, you can send e-mail to gmclure@ksu.edu.

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