

Wheat variety selection important

More than with any other crop, it seems that producers of wheat save their own seed from year to year, rather than purchase seed for planting. That practice may not always be a sound business decision. As producers look for opportunities to reduce input costs, saving money on purchased seed may be tempting, but could actually be costly in terms of decreased grain production.

Winter wheat variety trials at New Mexico State University's Agricultural Science Center at Clovis, and other locations in the southern Great Plains, show a great deal of variability in the yield potential of different wheat varieties.

In 2009, regional variety trials in the Texas Panhandle and eastern New Mexico showed the top five varieties in irrigated yield trials, on average, produced 22 percent more grain than the average for all varieties in the trial

(61.1 versus 50 bushels per acre, respectively). The five top-yielding varieties in dryland trials outperformed the overall trial average by 20 percent (34.9 versus 29.4 bushels, respectively).

With a price differential of \$9.55 per bushel between the price of certified wheat seed (\$11.50 per bag or \$13.80 per bushel) and elevator price for wheat (\$4.25 per bushel), it only requires a yield increase of less than two bushels per acre to recover the additional cost for certified seed in a dryland situation (seeding rate 45 pounds per acre). A yield increase of less than four bushels per acre will more than recover the cost of certified seed in an irrigated situation (seeding rate 90 pounds per acre).

Based on historical variety trial results, it should be reasonable to expect a yield increase of this magnitude in most years.

That said, I will acknowledge it isn't that



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easy to make the correct planting decision, since we don't know beforehand what is in store for the upcoming year. Factors like soil moisture at planting, planting date, seeding rate, insect and disease pressure, amount of precipitation, possibility of late hard freezes, grazing pressure and a number of other factors have the potential to affect grain yield.

Because of these uncertainties, it is generally recommended that producers, especially those with large acreages, plant multiple varieties with different levels of tolerances and responses to potential conditions and a history of good performance.

State university variety

trial Web sites are a good source of information on variety performance. Results from the Clovis science center trials are posted online at <http://clovisssc.nmsu.edu/variet-trials.html>. A link to summary results from the 2009 winter wheat trials conducted in the Texas High Plains and eastern New Mexico are also available on the site.

In addition to making the variety selection, growers should make sure equipment is calibrated and working properly, and should inspect seed before planting to be sure it doesn't contain noxious weeds, such as jointed goat grass, and that it is free from insect and mechanical damage, which can reduce germination.

Anyone seeking more information on wheat production should attend the Fall Wheat Production Workshop at 8 a.m. Sept. 8 at the Fire Station in Forrest. Information on that program can be

obtained from the Quay County Extension Office at (575) 461-0562. Other people who can help are your local county agricultural extension agents and the faculty at the Clovis science center.

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