

Producers have three choices when planting

Soils are generally very dry in much of Kansas, which presents an all-too-familiar dilemma to wheat farmers, said Jim Shroyer, Kansas State Research and Extension crop production specialist.

"Wheat producers faced with very dry soils basically have three main options, and these haven't changed over the years. Do I 'dust in' the seed and hope for rain, plant deeper than normal to place the seed into moisture, or just hold off and wait for rain before planting?" Shroyer said, "There are pros and cons to each option."

Dusting in the wheat at the normal

seeding depth and normal planting date is probably the best option, Shroyer said. The seed will remain viable in the soil until it gets enough moisture, he said.

Before planting, growers should look at the long-term forecast and try to estimate how long the dry conditions will persist, he added. This will help determine the best seeding rate to use.

"If it looks like there's a good chance the dry weather will continue until at least the back end of the optimum range of planting dates, producers should treat the fields as if they were planting later than the

optimum time. Rather than cutting back on seeding rates and fertilizer to save money on a lost cause, producer should increase seeding rates, consider using a fungicide seed treatment, and consider using a starter fertilizer," the agronomist said.

"The idea is to make sure the wheat gets off to a good start and will have enough heads to have good yield potential, assuming it will eventually rain the crop will emerge late," he said. "Wheat that emerges in November always has fewer fall tillers than wheat that emerges in September or October."

There are some risks to dust-in wheat, he cautions. For one thing, a hard rain could crust over the soil or wash soil off planting ridges and into the see furrows causing emergence problems.

Probably the worst-case scenario would be if a light rain occurs and the seed gets just enough moisture to germinate but not enough for the seedlings to emerge through the soil or to survive long if dry conditions return, he added. This could result in a loss of the stand.

Another option would be to plant deeper-than-normal into moisture during the optimal planting time, if

possible, Shroyer said. This option can work if the variety to be planted has a long coleoptile, the producer is using a hoe drill, and there is good moisture in reach.

The main risk of this option is poor emergence, he said. Deep-planted wheat normally has below-normal emergence, so a higher seeding rate should be used.

"Generally speaking, it's best to plant no deeper than three inches with most varieties," he said.

Finally, producers might simply decide to wait for rain and then plant, the agronomist said.

"Under the right conditions,

this would result in good stands, assuming the producer uses a high seeding rate and a starter fertilizer, if appropriate. If it remains dry ... the producer would then have the option of just ... planting spring crop next year instead," he said.

The risk of this option is the weather may turn rainy and stay wet later this fall, preventing the producer from planting at all while those who "dusted" their wheat in have a good stand, he said.

Crop insurance considerations and deadlines will play a role in these decisions, Shroyer added.

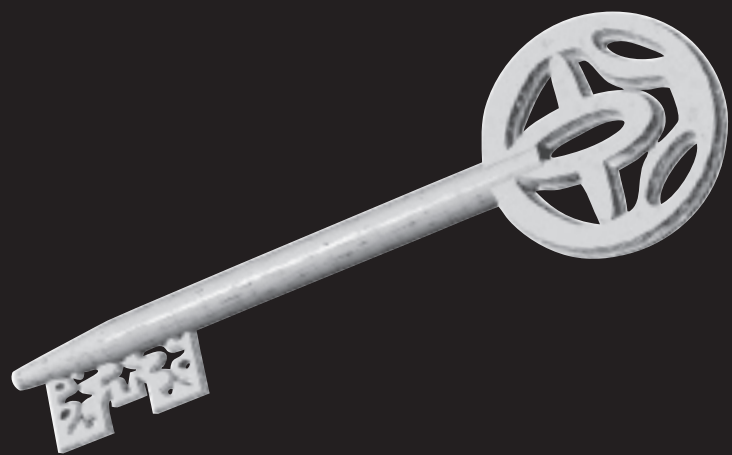
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