

Harvest 2010

Is Just Around the Corner!

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Kansas farmers plant smart with K-State data

UDALL – Forgive John Blankenship if he seems a bit anxious these days. The 2010 wheat harvest is just days away, and the Udall farmer has a pretty good feeling that it will be a good year on his 1,400-acre farm.

“Oh, it’s looking like it could make 45 to 50 bushels (per acre),” Blankenship said.

As a certified seed grower in Kansas, he planted Kansas State University’s new Everest wheat, among other varieties, late last fall. Wheat breeders developed Everest for its adaptability to growing conditions in central and eastern Kansas, but also to resist such wheat diseases as Fusarium Head Blight (scab), barley yellow dwarf and Hessian fly.

Blankenship also planted Fuller, another K-State variety, partially because of its resistance to leaf rust.

Every year, that’s one of the many tough decisions farmers make: choose a wheat variety in the fall that will best grow in the spring and early summer.

“The number-one thing farmers

want is higher-yielding wheat,” said Blankenship. “(As a seed grower) my customers need to know that they can depend on me to give them good information, and I want to give them as much good information as I can. Part of that comes from my experience growing a variety, but part of it is the information I get from K-State.”

Chris Drake, who farms near Pratt, tells a similar story.

“I’ve been going to the (K-State) wheat plot tours for about 15 years,” said Drake, who has just under 500 acres planted to wheat this year. “Most of my ground has a lower pH profile, so I don’t want to stick with one variety. I go off what Kansas State says quite a bit; I’m confident in what they’re telling me and trust that information.”

The university has formed partnerships with Kansas wheat farmers to develop test plots in every region of the state, which allows researchers to determine the best varieties for each area’s unique growing challenges. This year, K-

State’s Department of Agronomy said the university conducted 21 test plots with 56 wheat varieties (which include varieties produced by private companies), in addition to approximately 170 county-level demonstration plots, including one in Thomas County. The information is shared through county Extension offices during several wheat plot field days, which began in May and run through mid-June.

The county-level demonstrations also give researchers and Extension agents a chance to share information on current concerns with the crop, such as how to guard against this year’s surge in stripe and leaf rust disease.

“For me, going to an Extension meeting is a good way to get information,” Blankenship said. “You can go to college, but you’re not going to learn everything that you’ll need to know. You’ve got to continue to update your information.”

According to Kansas Wheat, a cooperative agreement between



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One of the biggest decisions farmers make each year is what varieties of wheat to plant. Kansas State University operates experiment stations to help them make that decision.

the Kansas Wheat Commission and the Kansas Association of Wheat Growers, more than 22,000 farmers grow wheat in Kansas. In 2009, they harvested more than 369.9 million bushels of wheat (an average of 42 bushels per acre), which is about one-fifth of all the wheat grown in the United States. In Kansas, the crop accounts for an average economic impact of

about \$2 billion each year.

“The information that Kansas State University provides through its annual series of plot tours and pre-plant wheat schools is invaluable. Wheat producers gain up-to-date information on the latest varieties, threats to the wheat crop, and quality attributes,” said Justin Gilpin, chief executive director of Kansas Wheat.

“This unbiased information helps Kansas’ wheat producers remain profitable, and ensures they provide the world’s consumers safe, reliable quantities of wheat.”

More information on the Kansas wheat crop, including weekly online updates, is available from K-State Research and Extension at www.ksre.ksu.edu/wheatpage.

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