

FOCUS on South Plains Agriculture

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Grain Agronomy

GRAIN SORGHUM SEED COSTS & 2013 SUPPLY

No kidding, seed is in short supply for 2013 due to reduced hybrid seed production in both 2011 and 2012. An increase in expected acres will further shorten supplies. This has created the highest grain sorghum seed cost we have ever seen.

Action Tips for Grain Sorghum Seed

- If you anticipate needing grain sorghum seed in 2013 I urge you to check with your preferred seed dealer now. Supply is declining and prices are subject to change (they won't be going down!). The longer you wait the less selection you will have.
- Be cautious about moving to a maturity of grain sorghum seed that is not appropriate for your production system. If all you can find is early maturity hybrids, then call another dealer. Don't book a medium-long or long season hybrid for dryland just because that's all you can get.
- Evaluate your seeding rate. For grain sorghum seeding rate targets in the South Plains or Texas High Plains, consult the two different United Sorghum Checkoff Program grain sorghum pocket guides that cover the Texas High Plains at <http://sorghumcheckoff.com/for-farmer/production-tools/> {These include editions for West Texas (South Plains, Concho Valley, Rolling Plains), and High Plains (Texas Panhandle)}. Many producers in Texas still plant more seed than they need, sometimes at the expense of grain yield. I would rather pick a preferred hybrid and reduce the seeding rate by 20% to stretch a limited supply of seed than go with something I am not familiar or is less appropriate.

Here is a sampling of grain sorghum seed prices (Dec. 18, 2012) from four seed companies with Texas High Plains sales. This represents both regional and national brands. Prices are the same across Texas.

Company #1: Concep III treated seed only (allows use of Dual Magnum herbicide), \$109/bag. Gaucho or CruiserMaxx treated, about \$159/bag. Three of six primary hybrids sold out, 1 is thin, 2 with modest supply. Discount 6% if paid by 12/31, 4% discount if paid in Jan.-Feb.

Company #2: \$100 to \$135/bag, depending on hybrid. Add \$18/bag for Concep III. Gaucho treatment about \$13-15/bag. Other premium comprehensive seed treatments somewhat higher

than Gaucho. Seed supply is extremely short, and some hybrids are sold out. No pre-pay discounts as seed supplies are too short.

Company #3: All hybrids are \$172-184/bag which have Concep III and CruiserMaxx. They don't sell grain sorghum seed any other way. All medium maturity hybrids sold out (at least in High Plains), but some supplies left of medium-early and medium-long. 7% cash discount if paid by Jan. 18, and quantity discounts available.

Company #4: \$102/bag for older lines, \$110/bag for newer lines, all Concep III treated. Up to \$64/bag for Poncho treatment. Seed supplies low and company will re-allocate remaining seed stocks in early January. Call about discounts.

CONDITION OF WHEAT CROP STANDS

Due to lack of rainfall much wheat is in only fair to poor condition. Even some irrigated wheat is struggling, and I believe this may be in part due to heavy irrigation of 2011 and 2012 in some areas that have received insufficient rainfall hence there is an accumulation of salts in the surface (this is a concern in Lynn Co. with some producers among others). In this situation, one of two options could be followed: 1) irrigate ~3" to flush the salt accumulation down, or 2) back off irrigation as long as the wheat is surviving so as not to further contribute to potential salinity issues.

What is a sufficient stand in a wheat field?

We are sometimes amazed at what a poor thin struggling wheat crop can deliver in the spring if timely rains come and it has access to nitrogen. I have seen many fields over the years that I wouldn't have given \$20/acre for based on their appearance in mid-February, however, natural precipitation, irrigation (if available), and sufficient nitrogen can revitalize such a crop and produce surprising results.

For irrigated wheat, stands that have as little as 10 plants per square foot, especially earlier planted wheat (by early November in the northwest South Plains, mid-November in the lower South Plains) have ample time to tiller and generate significant yield potential in spite of a thin stand. For dryland wheat, 7-8 plants per square foot can still deliver modest results. Much of the potential success in these fields indeed lies in the ability of the plant to tiller to compensate for thin stand.

Can N fertilizer help thicken a stand up?

Yes. Extension has often noted that thin stands can be helped by advancing some of your N forward to help drive some compensatory tillering. This is especially important if you have no pre-plant or at-plant N down on the field, which should be the case if irrigated.

Wheat prices are attractive for 2013

Prospective wheat prices for 2013 will urge some growers to do their best to drive for yield if the weather will allow it. Some producers have indicated they may take more of their wheat to grain (vs. forage) and then fallow that half a circle and grow a half circle of summer crop (rather than harvesting the wheat for forage then planting a full circle of summer crop—this will help manage limited water). We have time to make this decision.

Interestingly, Extension has received inquiries about taking irrigated wheat cover crops into grain. Seed rates as low as 30 lbs./A of an acceptable grain variety (but not beardless wheat), especially if planted earlier by mid-November, can deliver surprising grain yields because they have plenty of time to tiller. Producers who consider this should apply perhaps 20-25 lbs. N/A now as cover crop wheat is never fertilized. Multi-year yield data from Gaines and Yoakum Counties suggest that 30 lbs./A seeding rate yielded only about 10-15% less than irrigated wheat seeded at 60 lbs./A.

PREMATURE JOINTING AND HEADING OF SOME TRITICALES: NOT GOOD

Over the past month I have received inquiries from Bailey, Lamb (2), and Gaines Counties about triticale that had jointed, a head was moving up the stem, boot stage, and the triticales was clearly preparing to head. Planting dates ranged from early to late September.

This is similar to what happens when you plant photoperiod in-sensitive spring wheat too early in the fall, and we would expect the same from triticales. A few triticale lines like T-2700 and Grace are true spring types, and we have now learned more about apparent intermediate varieties (Bobcat and Fridge in the current cases) that have a significant presence of spring genes. Since these current intermediate varieties have reduced day-length or vernalization requirements, they can take off with enough heat units, according to Jackie Rudd, wheat breeder, Amarillo. We have not seen these varieties like Bobcat or Fridge do this in previous years—this is what the relatively warm fall has done, even in a couple cases where the triticales were planted in late September.

Our advice was to graze triticales off. According to industry experts these varieties once they approach boot stage there is really no turning back, nor would they recover after being grazed off. They will die out in the remaining winter. Furthermore, the hard freeze we had with temperatures in the low to mid-teens the week of December 10th likely would further injure and damage the stands. For the first booting spring triticale fields in late November Extension advised growers to graze quickly then replant triticales right away to maintain spring silage potential, however, spring-planted oats or these same spring triticales would now appear to be a better option.

GRAIN SORGHUM & CORN IN THE SOUTH PLAINS FOR 2013

Indications from producers, seedsmen, agricultural suppliers, etc. indicate a significant increase in grain sorghum and to some extent corn in the South Plains region in 2013. The corn increase is likely in central South Plains counties, and may be driven in part by much higher irrigated county T-yields vs. irrigated grain sorghum. Corn in particular must consider having sufficient irrigation to sustain a moderate yield potential using reduced seeding rates. Newer drought tolerant corn hybrids may help, but it is my opinion that your management of corn in the South Plains will have a much greater impact on your success than whether you seed a hybrid that is marketed as drought tolerant.

FOCUS on South Plains Agriculture staff are committed to ensuring that regional producers have sufficient resources to assist them in considering whether to plant grain sorghum or corn in 2013 and having the information you need to make sound decisions. Watch for further coverage of this topic beginning in January. CT

UPCOMING EXTENSION & AFFILIATED EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

In our next edition of FOCUS we will note as many as 20 upcoming winter educational programs, which begin January 14th and continue through mid-February. If you need information sooner on area programs that may be of interest contact your local Extension agent.

FOCUS on South Plains Agriculture

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