

July 5, 2016

The 2016 harvest begins

Combines began to roll yesterday in the southern tier of counties and initial reports are that yields are reasonably good and the quality is very good. Grain moisture was as low as 13 percent in some cases. Today, I am told that there is some harvest activity in central MI as growers search for wheat dry enough to harvest. In the Thumb, much of the wheat is completing its maturation and most harvest activity will be next week.

Harvest quality

The quality of MI's wheat, as it stands today, is very good. MI wheat watchers report Fusarium head scab symptoms to be very low. In fact, it's difficult to find any scab symptoms in many fields. Because of the dry weather, test weight should be very good and damaged kernels relatively low. The one concern is that this condition could change very quickly, as wet weather is predicted for the remainder of the week. Pre-harvest sprouting may also quickly become a concern.

MI 2016 wheat production

The MI NASS office has increased its estimate of the planted acreage from 580,000 to 600,000 and its projected harvest acreage from 560,000 to 570,000 ([Michigan acreage summary, June 30 '16](#)). This adjustment is not a surprise based on the casual observation of acreage seeded in the greater Thumb region last fall. According to MI NASS's [Ag Across Michigan, June 2016](#), average yields may exceed last year's 81 bu/ac. However, given the very dry conditions during the past month, an estimate of 79 or 80 bushel seems more likely.

Weather outlook a concern

The ten day weather outlook is not favorable for maintaining grain quality. Rainfall is possible for the next few days and another front may reach us next week. While maintaining test weights may suffer, a greater threat may be cases of pre-harvest sprouting. All growers should be prepared to harvest and dry their wheat as soon as possible, particularly if local harvest reports indicate that the falling number scores are trending downward.

Harvest reminders

Minimize the risk of pre-harvest sprouting:

Once grain reaches maturity (35 to 40 percent moisture), exposing it to moisture via rain, fog or mist can lead to the kernel behaving as a seed instead of a grain resulting in the initiation of the sprouting process. Sprouting is more likely under repeated wetting. To minimize the chance of sprouting (measured as falling number), harvest and dry grain as soon as possible (see [Understanding pre-harvest sprouting of wheat](#))



White heads are commonly seen, but rarely were they due to scab this season.

Combine settings:

Harvest conditions may warrant combine adjustments. For example, once it is determined that scab and associated DON levels are low, a grower might try running the combine's fan speed below its maximum setting to see how it effects grain cleaning and the loss of small kernels. Harvesting high moisture grain and tough straw will require further adjustments.

Straw harvest:

Harvesting and selling wheat straw can be a reasonable and profitable option for some growers. However, it is also important to recognize that straw has value when left in the field as it contains nutrients (at least 11 pounds of nitrogen, 3 pounds phosphate and 20 pounds of potash per ton) and it serves as a source of organic matter. Where straw is removed, growers would do well to use a cover crop to benefit soil quality and compensate for straw removal.

Use a cover crop:

If red clover was not under-seeded this past spring, MSU recommends establishing a cover crop following harvest. There are several summer annual and winter annual cover crops from which to choose (see [Cover Crop Choices following Wheat](#)).

Managing weeds:

Growers should note troublesome weeds within the wheat field. Of greatest concern is Windgrass. This weed has spread from the Thumb region into the Saginaw Valley and central MI. Its tiny seed tends to be carried in the combine and dribbles out on to subsequently harvested fields. Chess or cheat is also quite evident this year. This seed is difficult to separate from the wheat grain and, consequently, tends to be reseeded along with any bin-run wheat seed.

Avoid contamination:

There is zero tolerance for grain that has any evidence of seed treatment. Any equipment (wagons, augers, etc) that came into contact with treated seed should not be used for grain handling or, at least, thoroughly cleaned. There is also zero tolerance of fecal material. This might originate with birds that inhabit equipment storage structures, or where deer or raccoons frequent lodged grain.

Harvest safety:

All farmers should take steps to insure that equipment is in good repair and in working order. This should include everything from equipment steps to running lights. Also, everyone assisting in harvest should be made aware of all potential hazards associated with the harvest, hauling and storage of grain.



Grass weeds in wheat: Windgrass, Cheat & Bluegrass (lt to rt)