

## Growers Get Results From Wheat Management

By DANIEL GRANT *FarmWeek*, Feb 4, 2020

Winter wheat conditions vary around the state, but growers at the Double Crop Farmer's Forum in Mount Vernon say the crop looks better than expected so far, given the challenging planting season.

"Most of the wheat was planted in less-than-ideal conditions last fall, so there's not as much growth," said Mark Krausz, a farmer from New Baden (Clinton County) and secretary of the Illinois Wheat Association (IWA). "But, from what I'm seeing, there's lots of plants and tillers."

Wheat conditions improved slightly in the state last month, thanks in part to unseasonably mild conditions.

Nearly half the crop (47%) was rated good to excellent as of Jan. 26 along with 41% fair and 12% poor to very poor, the National Agricultural Statistics Service Illinois field office reported. Poor to very poor rankings totaled 16% as of Jan. 2.

"I know plantings were down (25% from the previous year) across the state (to 490,000 acres), but we got our wheat planted, and it looks good," said Don Guinnup, a Clark County wheat grower.

Farmers now are in the process of planning or executing nitrogen applications. Some growers who split-apply spring nitrogen already made their first application.

"Right now is a real critical time," said Matt Wehmeyer, a farmer from Mascoutah (St. Clair County) and vice president of AgriMAXX Wheat. "Go out and take tiller counts so you know how we need to influence (the crop)."

Wehmeyer strives for about 120 to 130 pounds per acre of spring-applied nitrogen. If tiller counts are high, he applies less N early in the year (around 40 pounds) and then 80 or 90 pounds in the spring. If tiller counts are low, he distributes the applications more evenly (about 60 to 70 pounds apiece).

A good fertilization program, along with attention to seed selection and timely fungicide applications, are keys to boosting wheat yields, according to Wehmeyer and fellow farmers Dan Rubin, IWA president from Fayette County, and Eric Brammeier (Washington County), who participated in a wheat growers' panel at the Double Crop Forum.

The event was organized by IWA and the Illinois Soybean Association. It followed IWA's 25th annual meeting.

"Putting time into the details (of wheat management) is important. There's no one silver bullet," Rubin said. "Our most profitable rotation is wheat and double-crop soybeans. Having wheat in the rotation helps our corn yields, too."

Farmers should select seed based in part on yield potential, head scab rating and standability. They also should follow the same tracks when making in-season applications on the crop to reduce damage.

“Boom widths have increased greatly, so leaving tracks isn’t the issue it was,” said Brammeier, who typically plants group 3 soybeans ahead of wheat so he can harvest that crop early and ensure timely wheat planting each fall.

Farmers should know their seed count as they plant. Many typically shoot for about 1.5 million seeds per acre.

“Wheat is one of the most responsive crops to management out there, and it can grow in a lot of different environments,” Wehmeyer added. “With attention to detail, you can really make this crop perform.”

Growers said the recent warm-up could stimulate some wheat growth, but they don’t expect the crop to completely break dormancy, yet.



*Eric Brammeier, right, a wheat grower from Washington County, discusses wheat management during a growers’ panel at the Double Crop Farmer’s Forum in Mount Vernon, while Matt Wehmeyer (St. Clair County), left, and Dan Rubin (Fayette County), center, await their turns. The event was organized by the Illinois Soybean and Wheat Associations. (Photo by Daniel Grant)*