

SMART

raises soybean yields and producers' expectations

By Keryn Page

Soybean yields that once would have seemed phenomenal now are a little disappointing for a Tupelo producer.

Keith Wiseman knows how to manage his crop the SMART way—with the Soybean Management by Application of Research and Technology program. SMART is provided through the Mississippi State University Extension Service and funded by the Mississippi Soybean Promotion Board. Wiseman said he has seen dramatically increased yields on his 300 acres of soybeans since adopting SMART management techniques.

"I've seen a 100 percent improvement in yields. I was making 20 bushels per acre, and now it's 40 bushels per acre," Wiseman said. "I used to think 25 bushels per acre was good, but now if I only make 35 bushels per acre, I'm disappointed."

Wiseman said he learned about the SMART program from his Extension agent and decided it might be beneficial for him.

"I was smart enough to know I wasn't smart enough to manage these soybeans myself," Wiseman said. "Yields of 8 to 25 bushels per acre just weren't enough, and I decided I needed some help."

Begun in 1992, SMART is a total management program for soybean crop production. Extension soybean production specialist Alan Blaine said the program looks at all aspects of production, including tillage practices, maturity groups, variety selection and planting dates.

"At MSU, we have all levels of expertise at our fingertips so we can try to make the best decision at each moment to help the grower," Blaine said. "We've collected long-term trend data on different systems, which allows us to see management techniques that are working over a large group of farms. We've used this as an avenue to find problems that growers have and pass those on to the research community in the hopes that they can address them."

Changes in planting time and more intensive crop scouting were the main management recommendations Wiseman followed to improve his yields.



The SMART program helps producers harvest more beans.

“Early planting is the biggest change I made in my crop management while in the SMART program,” Wiseman said. “I had been plowing when I should have been planting. Now I do my plowing in the fall and plant on a stale seedbed in the spring.

“Another thing I learned is you can’t tell what’s going on in the field by sitting in the truck at the end of the turnrow. You have to walk through the field and see what’s going on,” Wiseman said.

While enrolled in the program, Wiseman said Extension specialists came to his farm once a week. Although he rotated off the program in 2003, he said he feels confident that he can call on local Extension specialists if he has problems in the future.

Of all the crops grown in Mississippi, Blaine believes soybeans have the greatest potential for increased yields. For that to happen, growers must be willing to improve management practices.

“Growers who don’t have the time to manage crops should consider securing the services of someone—a consultant, a dealer or their Extension agent—who knows what’s going on, has the time to dedicate to the crop and will stay committed all year long. If you’re not going to do it, you’ve got to find somebody who can,” Blaine said. “The goal of the SMART program is to make money for producers. Even if you have to pay someone to manage your crop, you will improve your bottom line by getting someone to help with these intensive management practices.”

This year the SMART program had 36 participants. Blaine said he has a three-year waiting list of producers who want to get involved in the program. Growers typically rotate out after two years on the program so others can join.



Irrigation is one of the management practices emphasized in the SMART program.



Extension soybean production specialist Alan Blaine, right, checks the progress of a Coahoma County soybean variety trial with Terry Dulaney of Dulaney Seed Company.