U.S. Wheat and Barley Scab Initiative

FHB Tool Talk

Dear Extension Specialists, Crop Consultants, and Grower Organizations,

Spring will be here sooner rather than later and, if you haven't already, now is the time to make some key decisions to improve your odds of raising a high-quality spring wheat and barley crop. After all, luck does favor the prepared. Below are a couple of reminders from the USWBSI to get ahead of Fusarium Head Blight (FHB).

Tip #1: Seed with the most FHB resistant varieties of spring wheat and barley.
Not all varieties are created equal. Scientists at Land Grant Universities across the country conduct official performance evaluations under the authority of the Hatch Act in which they evaluate not just the yield potential of individual varieties, but also rate the varieties for their susceptibility to economically important diseases, including FHB.



If your state's Land Grant University no longer conducts variety performance evaluations for spring wheat or barley, check out the results of a neighboring state to get a feel for how the variety will perform on your farm.

Tip #2: Practice good crop rotation with a non-host crop.
While many of you have your crop rotations relatively set, markets and weather may have you changing your plants on a relatively short notice. Some tips for good crop rotation:

- Avoid planting spring wheat and barley following corn or another small grain. Corn harvested for grain has the greatest potential to provide the inoculum for FHB this season. This is followed by corn harvested for silage or wheat.

- Barley and oats provide a smaller risk but there are other rotational benefits of not following small grains with small grains.
- Soybeans are a great rotational partner to all small grains. The fungus that causes FHB survives on the crop residues left after harvest and becomes the primary source of in-field inoculum to cause FHB when the weather conditions this coming season turn favorable for disease development.

Tip #3: Plant early.
The risk of FHB infection is greatest with warm and humid weather. Seeding early reduces the odds that your spring wheat and barley crops encounter those weather conditions when it is most vulnerable to FHB infections.

Tip #4: Conventional tillage can reduce the primary inoculum source.
Removing the crop residue that harbors the inoculum from the soil surface reduces in-field inoculum. Burying corn stover this spring using a moldboard plow is an option. While not ideal for many reasons, weigh this option against the risk of delayed seeding.

Research has shown that, while moldboard plowing was the most effective, no-till was better than reduced tillage systems to reduce the inoculum load in the coming spring. Given that many parts of the upper Midwest are still in a moderate drought, you may want to consider no-till seeding your small grains, especially if we have a very early and dry spring.

Thank you for reading!

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