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Weather this week has been very humid with the highs in the mid 80 to low 90° F range. With the high humidity, afternoon thundershowers have been scattered throughout the Delta. USDA reported this week that the rice crop rates as 11% fair, 75% good, and 14% excellent.

USDA released their final acreage summary for 2007. USDA estimates that 174,000 acres of rice will be harvested this year in Mississippi. That is an 8% reduction in acres from 2006 and a 34% reduction from 2005. Total U.S. long grain rice acres were reduced by 5% this year. Total long grain acres for each state are as follows: Arkansas = 1,175,000 acres (9% reduction), Louisiana = 375,000 acres (12% increase), Missouri = 203,000 acres (5% reduction), and Texas = 148,000 acres (1% reduction). As a side note, medium grain rice acres increased by 2% to 583,000 acres.

The weather this week has been ideal for sheath blight. As a result, fungicides applications are being made to get this disease under control. Sheath blight prefers high humidity and temperatures in 85 to 90° F range. Under these conditions, the rice canopy is wet for most of the day, which allows for the disease to move more rapidly up the plant. With dry and hot climate conditions, sheath blight can still be a problem, but generally it is not as aggressive as in humid conditions.

With sheath blight pressure and severity on the rise this week, there have been many questions on variety/hybrid susceptibility, fungicides, rates, timings, and strategies.

#### **Varieties/Hybrid Susceptibility:**

CL-161 is by far the most susceptible variety to sheath blight. At the first of the week, I was scouting some CL-161 fields and found 1-2" lesions at the water line. By Wednesday, the lesions had moved an additional 4" up the plant. As we have seen in years past, sheath blight is very aggressive with this variety. If sheath blight is found in this variety, spray immediately. We have more consistently seen an increase in yield and economic return when applying fungicide.

Cocodrie is rated susceptible to sheath blight. This week, we have found sheath blight in this variety as well, but it has not been as aggressive as in CL-161. What I have been encouraging with this variety is first to scout for the disease to determine if it is present or not. If so, then monitor its movement up the plant the next couple of days to know how fast it is moving. If sheath blight can easily be found in the field and it has moved 4 - 6" up the plant, I would consider making a fungicide application.

Wells is rated moderately susceptible to sheath blight. Lesions have been found at the water line in this variety, but appears to be moving very slowly. With this variety, we can generally wait until the boot stage to make a fungicide application, if needed then. However, under these climate conditions, I would scout and monitor for sheath blight to make sure it is not aggressively moving up the plant.

Hybrid rice is rated moderately susceptible to sheath blight. I would monitor and manage these hybrids similar to Wells. In a trial last year that was under heavy sheath blight pressure, we did see a yield and economic return increase when a fungicide was used on XL723. Therefore, if you have hybrids, do not automatically think you are not going to have to spray them.

### **Fungicides, Rates, Timings and Strategies:**

If sheath blight is present and aggressive before the boot stage, I think a two-shot program is the best approach, especially with CL-161. On the first application, I would use Quadris at 6 to 9 fl oz/A. On the second application, I would use either Quadris at 6 fl oz/A, Quilt at 21 fl oz/A or Stratego at 17 fl oz/A. The second application would need to be made at the mid to late boot timing. As a note, do not assume that the sheath blight is under control with the first application and leave off the second application at boot. Generally, if the second application is left off, the sheath blight will emerge through the canopy shortly after heading.

If sheath blight is not aggressive, but appears to be a prevalent, a single fungicide application at the boot timing might be the best option. Fungicides and rates are as follows: Quadris 6 to 9 fl oz/A, Quilt at 21 to 31 fl oz/A, or Stratego at 16 to 19 fl oz/A.

The other thing I have been getting questions on is when to apply a propiconazole containing fungicide (Quilt or Stratego) for kernel smut protection. If applying in the early to mid-boot timing use the equivalent of 6 to 8 fl oz/A of Tilt. If applying mid- to late-boot timing use the equivalent of 4 to 6 fl oz/A of Tilt. When using a propiconazole containing fungicide before boot, an equivalent 8 to 10 fl oz/A will be necessary and can result in questionable control of kernel smut.

In closing, the best way to determine if a fungicide will pay for itself or not is proper scouting. You have to know if the disease is present and at what level of severity to justify the expense of a fungicide.

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