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Soybean Maturity

Soybeans can be a tough plant to figure out. Sometimes they put out a lot of foliage and not a lot of beans. Sometimes they are loaded with pods and shorter than ever. Sometimes they look like they are still green but are at harvest moisture. It can make any sort of harvest ‘planning’ difficult at best.

What we do know is once soybeans reach 50-60 percent moisture (brown bean in the pod starting to shrink down a little/detached from the pod wall), moisture often drops more quickly than we might think – maybe as much as three percent per day. That typically means we reach ‘optimum’ harvest moisture (13 percent give or take) quickly – and then drop even lower.

That drop even lower may not seem like much, but it can easily end up with ‘lost bushels’. Work done at the University of Nebraska (<https://cropwatch.unl.edu/harvest-soybeans-13-moisture>) illustrates this loss comparing a 60 bushel per acre yielding soybean crop at 13 percent (no pounds lost due to moisture correction) versus a 60 bushel per acre soybean crop at 10 percent – essentially giving up two pounds per acre. Different yields and prices change the numbers, but the bottom line is: losing moisture in the standing crop equals lost bushels.

To get ahead of moisture loss, consider harvesting at higher moisture levels, even though the crop may not look dry from the road (soybeans are fully mature when 95 percent of the pods are at their mature tan color). Moisture increases with dew and higher humidity. Harvest in less dry conditions can help retain moisture plus reduce harvest losses, too (four to five beans per square foot is approximately one bushel per acre). If storage and drying is an option, consider harvest at a higher moisture and aerating down to 13 percent.

Longer term, run some numbers using the link above. It might surprise you how much yield is lost due to moisture and may help guide maturity and planting decisions for 2022.

Preventing Sunscald

It’s barely fall, but already time to be thinking about sunscald prevention on younger and smooth barked tree species (fruit trees, ash, oak, maple, linden, willow, etc...) susceptible to sunscald and bark cracks. Preventative wraps should be applied in October/November and left on until next March.

Sunscald issues typically develop on the south/southwest side of trees during late winter after sunny, warm winter days heat the bark to relatively high temperatures, causing a potential loss of cold hardiness. Georgia research demonstrated that the southwest side of a peach tree trunk might be 40 degrees warmer than the shaded bark, resulting in cells becoming active at higher temperatures – and susceptible to lethal freezing when the temperature drops at night. Bark damage occurs in the way of sunken, discolored tissue in late spring that will eventually crack and slough off. Trees may well recover but require special care, including watering during dry weather.

Preventative measures for susceptible trees consist of light-colored tree wraps running from the ground to the start of the first branches. Apply now and remove in March before the wrap does damage to the tree.