

Wheat Profitability: Sensing your N-Rich Strips

Now is the time to be applying top-dress nitrogen (N) fertilizer. But for those of you who have N-rich strips in wheat fields you may be asking, when is the right time to sense and fertilize my fields? The best answer when using reference strips is that the time is right when you can see the strip stand out from the rest of the field. That's right using the N-rich strip and GreenSeeker™ can at times take patience. As long as you, and the sensor, can not see any difference there will be no or very little N recommended by the Sensor Based Calculator because the field has enough N. Only when the field becomes slightly N deficient and strip shows up can an N rate be made.

Until recently most of the state's wheat crop has not been not growing at any significant rate. Because of this it is unlikely that very many of the strips applied would have shown up unless it was in some early planted wheat or in one of the lucky locations that received rain. But with the recent moisture and warmer temperatures the crop is springing into action and starting to grow.

Just keep in mind as you are waiting on your strips that the field has too utilize all of the pre-plant and residual N before the strips will start showing up. The strips may not show up until just before hollow stem or not at all. If the strip never shows up that means the rest of the field had enough nitrogen to make its full yield potential for that season. There may be a few of you out there who just can not wait on the strips. My recommendations are to go ahead and apply but consider a slightly reduced rate. The N-Rich strip will be out there until harvest so that at if at any point in the future a deficiency develops you will know.

When you start seeing the strips develop do not delay. Get in touch with someone with a sensor for a site specific N rate prescription, or just make a judgment call and get the N on the field. Since the strips are visible you know the field needs additional N fertilizer.

Just remember that the N-rich strip is a tool that you can utilize to make your N application more efficient. It is your decision on how you use the tool and to what degree you follow its recommendations. Over the past several years of working with these techniques in farmers fields I have seen the recommendations come back as exactly what the farmer had planned to do, significantly higher rates, greatly reduced rates and even recommendations for no fertilizer. Every field every year will be different. For more information see go to www.nue.okstate.edu , email me, or contact your local county Ag Educator.

