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Low risk of stripe rust problems in Kansas

K-State wheat pathologist says despite ideal weather, the disease presents little concern

By Jacob Klaudt, K-State Research and Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. — As wheat fields approach the boot growth stage in southeast Kansas and flag leaf stages in the north-central part of the state, stripe rust weighs on many growers' minds.

Stripe rust, a fungal disease, is an annual concern, and this growing season's weather conditions provides a prime opportunity for it to cause havoc. It's left growers wondering if they need to apply a flag-leaf fungicide.

But Kansas State University wheat pathologist Kelsey Andersen Onofre said producers do not need to worry just yet.

"We have had misty mornings and a lot of cool temperatures, which is perfect stripe rust weather," she said. "Some good news, though, is that the disease risk in Kansas for stripe rust remains very low across the state."

Stripe rust survives winters in Texas, and this year parts of the Lone Star state were arid during those months, which stunted its development.

"It has to work its way back like a snowbird up the Great Plains every year," Onofre said. "We also didn't get reports out of Texas of stripe rust until late March, and levels remained low because of dryness there."

Additionally, there have been low reports of stripe rust in the other parts of the southern plains, according to Onofre.

"Recently, I heard a report of very low levels of stripe rust in southwest Oklahoma, but that's the first report I've heard out of that state, and that's late for us," she said. "And then we haven't had any reports to date in Kansas, so that is actually good news."

If growers detect stripe rust in Kansas before April 15, that usually indicates it could be a bad year, and having not seen any stripe rust in late April so far, Onofre said there's a low chance it will catch up with producers.

"We could see some and I wouldn't be surprised if we do find some late in the season," she said. "Certainly, keep scouting because we have the conditions for stripe rust, yet the chance that we're going to have a big outbreak is getting lower and lower every day as we move into the flag leaf point of crop development."

Onofre recommends producers scout their fields, stay current on stripe rust reports and continually monitor weather to position properly themselves for possible outbreaks.

"This disease is pretty easy to distinguish," she said. "It causes characteristic yellow stripes on the wheat leaves; you can tell it apart from other stresses because it produces these yellow spores that – if you run your finger across the leaf – it'll come off on your finger."

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Story by:
Jacob Klaudt
jbklaudt@ksu.edu

More information:
Kelsey Andersen Onofre
785-410-2426
andersenk@ksu.edu