



Field Notes for The Week Of

2-14-22

Can Winter be Hard On Winter Wheat?

This past week was a great improvement in weather compared to the prior week, with little to no precipitation and a few days reaching 50 degrees. The mild temperatures allowed for the snow and ice to melt away but at a slow pace. As the snow melted, I was able to take some time to start walking pastures and hay fields. I am amazed with the how hard this winter has been on both perennial forages and annual cereal grain crops. Due to the very wet fall and delayed harvest, acres of winter wheat are far and few in-between around the county or every southern Ohio. Soft Red Winter wheat can be a great addition to a farms crop rotation but there are many factors that has caused acreage to decrease of the last 10 years. Factors such as price, management, disease pressure, high fertility cost, and delayed soybean planting are just a few of those factors. Current prices for wheat are very strong due to many factors such as drought conditions in the breadbasket and southern plains, less acreage planted in Europe, strong global demand, loss of acres to corn and soybeans.

Here locally winter wheat conditions are not the greatest. If you were lucky enough to get some wheat planted between the rains last fall, you might be noticing that young wheat plants have turned a burnt brown color. Some questions that come to this agriculture educators mind is why and will it snap out of this condition? Here are some considerations on winter injury and why you should be vigilant on scouting your wheat crop going into the spring season.

1. Large temperature swings can be very hard on winter wheat. When temperatures rise above freezing, wheat can start to grow and when temps fall below freezing this can damage new growth.
2. Not all damage is bad in early growth stages small amounts of damage can stimulate tillering, this is the plants response to damage so it will produce a seed. This can gain yield if the remainder of the growing season is favorable.
3. Early planted wheat has greater winter survival. It takes about one month for winter wheat to store up enough energy in the root system to survive winter. It is best for young plants to have 4-5 leaves and at least one tiller before winter sets in.
4. Temperatures at the crown level makes all the difference in winter survival. When soil temp at the crown level (planting depth) reach 45-50°F, wheat will lose a little bit of it winter hardiness. Up and down soil temps can hurt winter survival rates.

