



Plant Diseases

Will there be enough fungicides to treat rust this year?

by Ron Heck, American Soybean Association

I wish I could give you an easy answer to the question posed in the title of this article, but there isn't one. There is no easy answer because no one knows precisely where and to what degree *Phakopsora pachyrhizi*, the fungus that causes Asian soybean rust, will infect U.S. soybean fields this crop season.

However, that does not prevent you from being prepared if the disease hits Iowa. Here's my advice to Iowa soybean producers concerned about Asian soybean rust:

- Learn about the fungicides that will be used to treat this disease.
- Identify a local dealer that will be able to supply you with fungicides when you need them.
- Learn how to scout your field for Asian soybean rust.
- Keep up on the spread of the disease in the United States this crop season.

The reason to expect fungicide availability is twofold. First, the companies that produce fungicides have a strong financial incentive to make sure there are enough fungicides available when needed in the United States. The reason: U.S. farmers are good customers and pay their bills. Because the fungicide producers sell to the worldwide market, they have the ability to move product quickly.

The other reason I am positive about this situation is because of astounding response to a meeting I chaired on behalf of the American Soybean Association (ASA) two years ago. It set into motion a cooperative effort between U.S. government officials, agronomists, soybean producers, the United Soybean Board, and farm chemical producers.

In my position as president of ASA, I asked these groups to come together to prepare for the inevitable spread of this disease to U.S. soybean fields.

One of the first issues we addressed was expanding the research underway to help U.S. scientists better understand the disease. USDA Agricultural Research Service (ARS) staff developed research trials in countries already managing the disease. Because the ARS could not fund this research, the United Soybean Board stepped forward and provided the necessary financial resources.

Next, the group identified which fungicides would likely be successful in treating the disease in the United States. States and fungicide producers then worked with the EPA to get approval for using these chemicals.

By getting USDA, EPA, ag chemical industry, and producers working together, we have been able to learn from the experiences of other countries, especially Brazil, in managing this disease and taking the action we hope will minimize the effects on the U.S. soybean crop.

Another positive step from the U.S. government was President Bush's Homeland Security Presidential Directive/HSPD-9, which established a national policy to defend the agriculture and food system against terrorist attacks. HSPD-9 directed the Secretary of Agriculture to work with the secretaries of Homeland Security and Health and Human Services and the administrator of EPA on high-consequence plant diseases such as soybean rust.

There are a few things I am certain about with regard to Asian soybean rust. This disease will result in crop losses for some soybean producers. Because the weather and topography of the United States are unique, this disease will not act the same as it does in other countries. Finally, I think all U.S. stakeholders have acted aggressively and proactively to keep this disease from devastating the U.S. soybean industry. I don't know the answer to the question about adequate fungicide supplies, but I do know we have made great strides in preparation and continue to do so every week.

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