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Last Call for Soybean Cyst Nematode Sampling

For the past three years, the K-State Plant Disease Diagnostic Lab, via a Soybean Cyst Nematode (SCN) Coalition grant, has offered a limited supply of free SCN samples to Kansas producers. If you suspect soybean cyst nematode might be a production issue in your soybean fields, take advantage of this program soon. Time is limited.

We often don't notice SCN because they're small and damage closely mirrors other field issues. All of its reproduction/feeding occurs on roots. Even digging up plants to find them can be a difficult process due to field variability and their small size. Because the nematode interferes with plant uptake of water and nutrients, it looks a lot like heat/moisture stress – or other diseases like charcoal rot. You may not even know you have an issue until levels have increased to a point where substantial yield loss is already occurring.

Since 2019, a sampling of 30 plus fields across the Meadowlark Extension District confirmed around half had soybean cyst nematode present. Fortunately, none of the positives were at levels likely resulting in significant yield losses. Unfortunately, levels can grow over time. That's why monitoring potential trouble spots via programs like these are important.

Areas of poor production in many fields this year were likely due to moisture stress. If you've noted a pattern of poor production in a field area over time, however, it might be time to rule out SCN. Did you notice areas exhibiting yellowing leaves, stunted plants, and early maturity, often in a circular pattern? It may end up being nutrient deficiency, herbicide injury, compaction, drought, or root rot – but sampling for SCN can't hurt, either. For instructions on sampling and submission, contact me via any District Office or dhallaue@ksu.edu.

Was the Rain Enough?

Fortunately, much of the area saw beneficial rain last week. Unfortunately, soil moisture levels may not have recovered enough to supply the winter long needs of many landscape plants.

Much of our late season moisture has been of the 'light sprinkling' nature, wetting only the uppermost portions of the soil profile. Landscape plants need more, with moisture to a minimum of twelve inches more optimum for winter survival and spring growth. This is especially true for newly planted trees and shrubs (limited root systems) and evergreen trees (because they are losing moisture all year long).

Soil moisture levels can be accessed via the Kansas Mesonet at: <https://mesonet.k-state.edu/agriculture/soilmoist/>. Even during last week's rain event, you could monitor the rise in soil moisture levels and get a ballpark idea about how soil moisture levels might be faring.

If you want to check out your 'local' landscape, use a metal rod, wooden dowel, electric fence post turned upside down or something similar to check moisture depth. Dry soil is much harder to push through than wet, and you can get a pretty good idea in pretty short order whether this rain has been enough – or if supplemental watering would be beneficial.

KSU Horticulture Specialist Dr. Ward Upham suggests a 'normal' winter may require only a single watering before spring. If it stays warm and dry? Consider watering monthly.