

Critical Management Inputs for High Yield Wheat Production
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1). Use deep tillage to disrupt hard pans.

Wheat responds well to deep tillage when hard pans are present in our soils. Prepare soils for planting by first tilling with a V-ripper, chisel plow, paraplow or subsoiler. Firm the seed bed with a cultipacker or small, light disk to reduce deep ruts from planting. Till the soil only to a depth necessary to break the hard pan. Simple disking is not as effective as deep tillage but it is preferred over no-tilling wheat. No-till wheat can be productive (mostly on heavy, clayey soils) but the yields, in general, are 5 to 25 bushels per acre less than conventionally tilled wheat.

2). Plant high yielding, pest resistant, well adapted varieties.

Yield data for all the recommended varieties for Georgia are found in the current 2007 Georgia Wheat Production Guide or Georgia Small Grain Variety Performance Test Bulletin. In addition, variety characteristics are noted in each publication. Be sure to note each of the variety characteristics of the variety you choose such as vernalization, maturity, lodging resistance, pest resistance so as to manage each variety properly for highest yield.

NOTE: Seed supply is extremely short in 2007. There are many varieties currently offered for sale in Georgia that are better adapted for the mid-south (Missouri, Arkansas, Tennessee, etc) and have not been tested in Georgia. Check with your local county Extension office for the latest information on these varieties. While some may perform to satisfactory levels, others have characteristics that may be too difficult to overcome with good management.

3). Plant the appropriate seeding rate for your planting method.

Wheat can be successfully established by either drilling or broadcasting the seed and incorporating into the soil to a shallow depth. In general, drilling wheat yields 7 to 8% more yield. If incorporation of broadcast seed is poor, then yield differences are even greater. In a drill, seed wheat planting 18 to 22 seeds per row foot (7.5 inch drill width). This is equivalent to approximately 30 seeds per square foot. Use 10 to 15% more seed when planting after the recommended planting window. Wheat emerges best when planted 1 to 1.5 inches deep. When broadcasting the seed, calibrate the equipment to plant 40 seeds per square foot. When possible, always use high quality, certified seed and save a tag of each separate lot for good record keeping.

4). Plant during your recommended planting period.

The recommended planting dates for Georgia are the seven days prior to and after the five year average first frost day for your farm. Varieties with long vernalization requirements should be planted in the first seven to ten days prior to the first frost day. Due to the short seed supply in 2007, many mid-south varieties have been sold for planting in Georgia. These must be planted in the first few days of the recommended planting window to provide the best opportunity for proper vernalization. Extremely

early varieties with short vernalization requirements such as Fleming must be planted in the very last days of the recommended window. These varieties will suffer winter injury if planted too early as they would enter the jointing phase (Zadoks GS 32) prior to the time that sub-freezing temperatures generally do not occur. See the website: www.GeorgiaWeather.net for help in determining your first frost date.

5). Scout fields for early insect infestations and control potentially damaging insects.

Hessian fly and aphids are the two insects generally causing yield loss in the fall. Control insects by either planting resistant varieties and or using an approved insecticide. Protect wheat from Hessian fly by planting resistant varieties or treating seed either with Cruiser[®] (thiamethoxam) or imidacloprid. See the Georgia Pest Control hand book for proper rates. These seed treatments are also effective against aphids. Aphids vector the Barley yellow dwarf virus and it is important to protect wheat from this virus. For both insects, scout wheat fields 25 to 35 days after emergence for the presence of either aphids or Hessian fly. Apply an approved pyrethroid insecticide if either is present and no seed treatment has been used. Again, scout just prior to topdressing. If aphids are present, then combine insecticides with the nitrogen fertilizer to prevent spring infestations. Thresholds and rates are listed in the Pest Control handbook and Wheat Production Guide.

6). Control weeds early to prevent yield loss.

Control ryegrass, wild radish, wild turnips, onions, garlic, henbit, chickweed, and vetch early for maximum weed control efficiency and high yield. Waiting to control these weeds till the spring causes considerable yield loss due to lost tillers and reduced herbicide effectiveness. Scout wheat 25 to 35 days after emergence. Note any weed infestations. Control broadleaf weeds when the weed is small (i.e. 2 to 4 inch wild radish). Products such as Express[®] or Harmony Extra[®] are preferred due to their effectiveness and a large window of safe application. Do not apply 2, 4-D on wheat that is not fully tillered or injury will occur. Also, do not apply 2,4-D to wheat beyond the first hollow stem phase or injury will occur. Control ryegrass when the plant is between the 2 leaf to 2 tiller stage. Products such as Hoelon[®], Axial[®], and Osprey[®] are very effective. Osprey also has some activity against small broadleaves. For residual control of ryegrass, tank mix 1.5 pts of Prowl H₂O[®] with your post-emergence herbicide. Prowl must be applied to wheat that is established and growing. See the Georgia Pest Control Handbook or Wheat Production Guide for rates and timing information.

7). Soil test and apply all nutrients according to recommendations for high yield.

Wheat should be planted in soils that have a pH of 6.0 to 6.5. If fertilizing for the wheat crop only, apply all phosphorus and potassium in the fall during seed bed preparation according to soil test recommendations. If applying nutrients for the subsequent crop as well, apply ½ of the potash in the fall and the remainder during the spring at topdressing. Nitrogen should be used in the fall to encourage tiller production prior to the onset of winter. It is important not to over-fertilize with nitrogen as it may cause excessive growth and result in winter injury. In general, apply N (based on the previous crop rotation) as follows:

Cotton: 35 to 40 lbs ac
Corn: 30 to 35 lbs ac
Fallow: 25 to 30 lbs ac
Soybeans: 15 to 20 lbs ac
Peanuts: 0 to 10 lbs ac

NOTE: If using poultry litter, obtain a nutrient analysis so as to adjust the rate of application according to the nutrient content. In general, 2 tons per acre is sufficient for fall growth. Applying more may increase risk to excessive growth and winter injury.

8). Topdress wheat with nitrogen in a timely manner in late winter and early spring.

During the later days of January, begin counting tillers to determine the need for additional nitrogen applications for the proper tiller production. If tiller counts (a stem with at least three leaves) exceed 80 or more per square foot at Zadoks GS 25, then apply all remaining nitrogen at GS 30 (stem elongation). Usually this occurs during early to mid-February. If the tiller count is less than 80, then apply 30 to 40 lbs of N per acre to encourage tiller production prior to the onset of stem elongation. Complete the topdressing prior to 1st node stage. Nitrogen rates will vary according to the soil type, variety lodging resistance, irrigation capability, previous crop, etc. In general, total N rates range from 100 lbs N per acre to 120 lbs N. Tank mix an approved pyrethroid if aphids are present to reduce the risk to the barley yellow dwarf virus. Supply 15 to 20 lbs of S per acre if soils are sandy.

9). Scout fields for the onset of diseases.

Powdery mildew, stripe rust, leaf rust and leaf and glume blotch are diseases that can be control with an approved fungicide application. Begin scouting fields when the plant reaches GS 32-37 (Feekes GS 7-8). In general, powdery mildew and stripe rust will likely appear first. If no disease is present by GS 58 (Feekes 10.5) but expected, then apply the proper rate of Quilt[®], Stratego[®], Headline[®] or Quadris[®] to maintain the high yield potential and test weight. See the Georgia Pest Control Handbook or Wheat Production Guide for rate and timing information.

10). Harvest as early as possible.

Soft red winter wheat easily sprouts when the grain is exposed to rainy conditions after maturity. Harvest the crop as soon as possible to avoid field losses and to maintain good quality grain. Dry the grain if harvesting above 15% moisture.