Which Wheat to Grow Where?

Which type of wheat makes most sense on your farm?

Some situations are better suited to certain wheat varieties than others. Looking at yield indexes is only the first step in establishing which wheat variety and type is best suited to your needs. Major factors to consider include; growing region, crop rotation, residual fertility, soil type, drainage and total wheat acreage.

Rule number one is to grow more than one variety or type of wheat. Varieties with various heading dates and maturities are not all ready to harvest at the same time, and are not susceptible to diseases such as fusarium at the same time. "Last year, we saw bunt, sprouting, fusarium and a number of other production problems" says Pat Lynch, Cargill agronomist. "The best way to ensure against a major problem is to plant different types of wheat. Growers with large acreage should plant several types and varieties. Even smaller growers should grow at least 2 different types of wheat."

If you're growing soft whites, Lynch recommends light land. "Everything dries out faster on lighter ground," he says. "It means if you get into a rainy harvest season, you can get on the land earlier and harvest it even if you have to pay drying costs. This is better than being docked for delivering feed grade wheat due to sprouting."

"High fertility land clearly calls for hard red wheat varieties," says Lynch. "If you have land that routinely receives manure, has recently produced a legume crop or simply has residual fertility, hard reds are your best choice. Harvard, Maxine and Carlisle respond well to high rates of nitrogen and have excellent standability. Hard red is the only crop that will pay you for producing high protein levels."

Soft reds are the predominant wheat type due to overall agronomic performance. Soft reds make most sense on farms which have difficulty making protein with hard reds, and have a history of pre-harvest sprouting with soft whites.

In lower heat unit areas where winter-kill is routine, consider spring wheats. Newer spring wheats offer dramatic improvements in performance, and are ideal for underseeding. Spring wheats are best limited to areas of 2750 or fewer heat units