

Looking for Good Wheat Yields Next Harvest? —Stack the Deck in Your Favor This Fall

by Phil Needham

TECHNIQUE

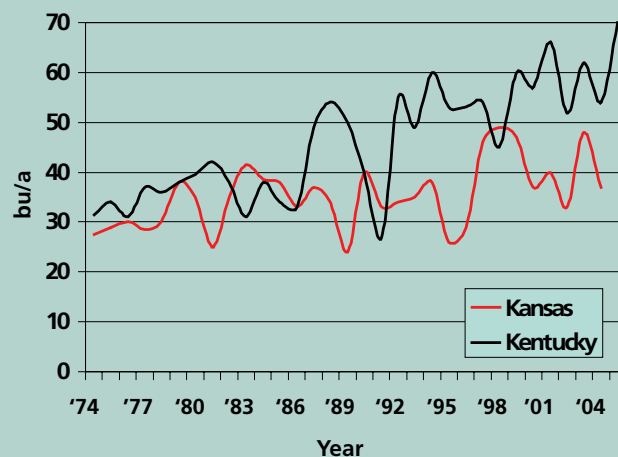
Phil Needham owns Needham Ag Technologies, and previously managed Opti-Crop.

Needham has undertaken extensive consulting and managerial efforts around the world, and is widely recognized for his skills in teaching improved cropping practices and dramatically improving yields (and profits). He and the Opti-Crop team have contributed to a doubling of the Kentucky state wheat yield within a 15-year period, from the low 30-bu/a range to the high 60s.

While some growers have done extensive planning for the wheat crop they'll plant this fall, others may need to quickly gear up to avail themselves of the many proven techniques to step up their wheat yields. Whether you currently produce 25-, 50-, or 100-bu/a wheat, there are many ways of increasing yields (despite difficult growing conditions) and boosting profits, sometimes even reducing production expense. There aren't any secrets: I simply encourage growers to take advantage of technologies and good management practices, give them ways of eliminating yield-limiting factors one by one, and try to get them to take each opportunity seriously.

I have compiled a 'Top Ten' list of early-season management factors that should help growers make the best

Wheat Yields – Kansas vs Kentucky 1974 - 2005 state averages



start with their winter wheat crop and maximize their yields next harvest. For the readership of *Leading Edge*, I assume that no-till practices and crop rotations are already being used. (*Editors' Note: Needham is indeed a strong proponent of no-till and rotations.*) The Top Ten items are listed in a logical thought-flow progression, rather than order of importance.

1. Straw & Chaff Distribution. Many factory and aftermarket modifications can be added to combines to improve chopping and spreading performance. A competent dealer will be able to direct producers to the best upgrades for this. I do recognize that many producers across the North American Great Plains region use custom cutters to harvest soybeans, wheat, and other crops that precede wheat, but this does not mean these producers should ignore the potential upgrades and modifications. If the cutter is not willing to do the job that's required to spread residue and set the stage for your next crop, find someone who will. Many times, helping the custom cutter to make some simple adjustments will be all it takes



Photo by Phil Needham.

Many producers struggle with no-till because of poor residue distribution out the back of the combine. This John Deere STS machine is leaving a band of heavy soybean residue about 10 feet wide behind the combine. Such residue streaks lead to poor consistency of seeding depth, in addition to nutrient and moisture variations. Adjustment of the fin position on the tailboard and/or raising the tailboard upward at the back will improve the distribution, although sometimes aftermarket options may need to be considered.