Kentucky Field Crops News

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Martin-Gatton College of Agriculture, Food and Environment | Grain and Forage Center of Excellence

UK Wheat Science Group
UK Corn & Soybean Science Group

In This Issue

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Crush Growth vs. Export Declines: Can U.S. Soybeans Find Support?

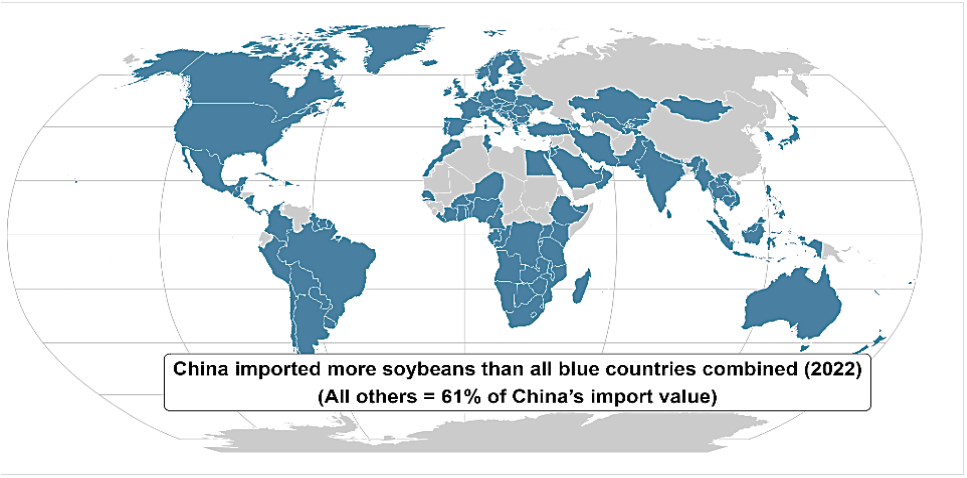
Dr. Grant Gardner, UK Extension Economist

Note: This article was originally written for Sothern Ag Today.

Following strong prices in 2022 and 2023, soybean values have fallen sharply from highs above $14 to levels near $10.00 across much of the United States. At these prices, soybeans are projected to generate negative returns during the 2025/26 marketing year. Looking ahead, November 2026 soybean futures are trading near $11.10. Assuming a $0.50 harvest basis, a trend yield of 55 bushels per acre, and $650 per acre in input costs, estimated returns still imply roughly an $12 per-acre loss. The signal is clear: soybean supply continues to outpace demand at current production levels, and without stronger demand, profitability will remain elusive.

Between 2019 and 2022, U.S. soybeans were split roughly between exports (44%) and domestic crush (47%), with the remainder going to seed, feed, residual use, or ending stocks (Oilseed Yearbook, 2025). Recently, crush expansion has boosted domestic demand, but exports have declined, particularly due to reduced Chinese purchases (Gerlt, 2025). The U.S. recently negotiated a trade agreement under which China will purchase 12 million metric tons (MMT) of U.S. soybeans by January 2026, followed by 25 MMT annually from 2027 through 2029. This level would return Chinese buying close to 2024/25 volumes (Clayton, 2025). While the agreement provides some near-term support, questions remain about fulfillment and what happens beyond 2029.

In the near term, renewed Chinese buying represents the most direct path back to profitability. Crush expansion is important but largely anticipated by markets and will ramp up gradually; it cannot immediately offset recent export weakness. Meanwhile, China remains by far the dominant global buyer: in 2022, China imported more soybeans than all other countries combined, with the rest of the world accounting for just 61% of China's import value (Figure 1). Over the long run, diversifying export markets can reduce reliance on China and lower price risk, but fully replacing Chinese demand is unrealistic.



Source: World Integrated Trade Solution Data
Created by Grant Gardner

Figure 1: World Demand for Soybeans Outside of China, 2022

Longer-term, continued crush growth provides a pathway to tighter balance sheets. Figure 2 illustrates how expanded crush capacity could increase domestic use even if Chinese purchases do not return to prior highs. Projected crush use climbs steadily after 2025 (Gerlt, 2025), supported by renewable diesel and other biofuel investments that may anchor domestic soybean demand going forward. If exports can stabilize near current projections, or strengthen modestly, the combination of incremental trade growth and rising domestic crush could gradually restore profitability.

The recent trade agreement may buy time, but building durable soybean demand outside of China will be essential to a more resilient soybean market beyond 2029.

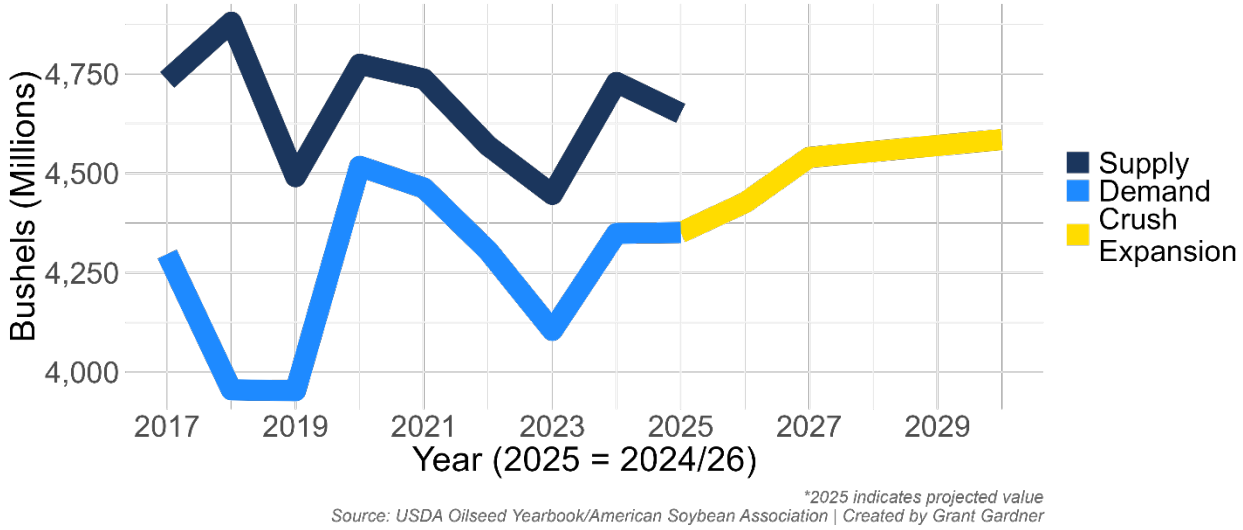


Figure 2: Soybean Supply, Demand and Projected Crush Expansion

Citations:

Clayton, Chris. "Trump Champions Soy Deal for Farmers." Progressive Farmer. October 30, 2025. https://www.dtnpf.com/agriculture/web/ag/news/article/2025/10/30/bessent-china-agrees-buy-nearly-1-us

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Citation: Gardner, G., 2025. Crush Growth vs. Export Declines: Can U.S. Soybeans Find Support? Kentucky Field Crops News, Vol 1, Issue 11. University of Kentucky, November 14, 2025.

Dr. Grant Gardner, UK Extension Economist
(859) 257-7280 grant.gardner@uky.edu

Corn and Soybean Variety Trial Data Now Available

Cam Kenimer and Bill Bruening

The University of Kentucky corn and soybean variety trial information is now available online. You can access the information through the QR Code in this article. The data was collected from 7 corn locations and 6 soybean locations across the major growing areas of Kentucky.

A wet spring led to delayed planting in some trials, so pay close attention to planting dates and all the agronomic information. Remember, the multi-location state summary data is the best resource for making variety selection decisions. Growers should only use single location data in conjunction with the state summary data to identify varieties that performed well both across the state and at their regional location.

For Corn, you will find good yields across all locations, except Fayette County. This was due to planting date and then the hot, dry weather in that area in late summer. This led to a CV that is higher. The coefficient of variation (CV) is a calculated value that helps indicate unexplained variation in these studies. A smaller CV indicates less unexplained variation and more precise results. Field variability is usually amplified under less ideal/stressful environments.

For Soybean, yields across trial locations were dramatically different based on precipitation levels at each site. CV values were acceptable to good at all locations, except the Warren County site where drought stress fostered highly variable results (which was not included in the state summary).

For more information on all these tests, or to contact Bill Bruening or Cam Kenimer, please visit the website via the QR Code. We'd like to thank the Kentucky Corn Promotion Council and the Kentucky Soybean Promotion Board for their support and all others who helped make another successful year in variety testing!

Citation: Kenimer, C., Bruening, W., 2025. Corn and Soybean Variety Trial Data Now Available. Kentucky Field Crops News, Vol 1, Issue 11. University of Kentucky, November 14, 2025.

Cam Kenimer, UK Agriculture Research Specialist
(859) 627-1422 ckenimer@uky.edu
Bill Bruening, UK Research Scientist III
(859) 218-0802 bill.bruening@uky.edu

UK Grain and Forage Center of Excellence Announces 2025 Kentucky Wheat Yield Contest Winners

Jennifer Elwell, M-G CAFE Marketing and Communications

The Grain and Forage Center of Excellence (GFCE) — an initiative of the University of Kentucky Martin-Gatton College of Agriculture, Food and Environment and housed at the UK Research and Education Center at Princeton — announced the winners of the 2025 Kentucky Wheat Yield Contest.

Contest administrator and GFCE director Chad Lee said that while achieving the top yields in the state is commendable, the provided entry information helps the UK Wheat Science Group determine best practices for wheat production and grain quality.

"When farmers participate in the Kentucky Wheat Yield Contest, the entry data allows our wheat research specialists to see what management practices are taking place to achieve the highest yield levels across the state," Lee said. "It gives us ideas for research down the road, allowing us to ask if these practices need more study and could benefit more producers."

Achieving the highest 2025 state yield in the no-tillage division with an average of 134.63 bushels per acre was Hunt Farms of Christian County. They planted Pioneer 25R64 variety soft red winter wheat. Hunt Farms' yield was the second-highest yield overall in the contest's 39-year history.

Earning the top average yield of 114.75 bushels per acre in the tillage division was Gates Farm LLC of Henderson County. They planted Revere Reagan soft red winter wheat.

Lee said that this was also the first time a farmer was awarded for wheat quality, an honor given to Folz Farms in Christian County. In addition to achieving a no-tillage yield of 120.57 bushels per acre using AgriMAXX 513 seed, their wheat had a test weight of 62.6 pounds, 9.3% protein and other grain characteristics that improve baking quality.

"The quality award was added because it is important for our wheat buyers," Lee said. "While some of the grain is used for the distilling industry, most of Kentucky's wheat is used to produce baked goods such as biscuits, cookies and cakes. This new data will help us learn how production decisions impact the characteristics wheat buyers are looking for."

Farms with the highest yield in each production area were also named. The Area 1 winner was Folz Farms of Christian County, achieving an average yield of 123.31 bushels per acre using Beck's 728 seed. The Area 2 winner was S and J Emmick Farm of Hancock County, which achieved an average yield of 127.47 bushels per acre using AgriMAXX 525 seed. Area 3 had no entry due to adverse weather conditions in that region. The Area 4 winner was Wright Brothers Farms of Breckinridge County, achieving an average yield of 116.89 bushels per acre using AgriMAXX 513 seed.

Contest winners will be honored at the Kentucky Commodity Conference in Bowling Green on January 15, 2026, where they will receive their awards. The Kentucky Wheat Yield Contest is sponsored by the Kentucky Small Grain Growers Association, UK Cooperative Extension Service, Siemer Milling Company and other agribusinesses.

For full results and more information on the Kentucky Wheat Yield Contest, visit https://graincrops.mgcafe.uky.edu/kentucky-yield-contests.

Citation: Elwell, J., 2025. UK Grain and Forage Center of Excellence announces 2025 Kentucky Wheat Yield Contest winners. Kentucky Field Crops News, Vol 1, Issue 11. University of Kentucky, November 14, 2025.

Jennifer Elwell, M-G CAFE Marketing and Communications

Seed Size and Crop Yield in Kentucky in 2025

Dr. Dennis B. Egli, UK Professor Emeritus

The year 2025 might turn out to be the year of the 'small seeds'. Some producers harvested seeds that are smaller than normal. The explanation for this phenomenon lies in the interaction between the vagaries of the weather and the stage of crop development.

This year started out as a good year (rainfall in Kentucky from January through July was above normal, according to Matt Dixon, Senior Meteorologist in the Ag Weather Center, raising hopes for good yields, but the bottom dropped out when it stopped raining in August. This August was the driest on record (total rainfall for the month was 1.29 inches, 2.5 inches below normal); September was better, but there were still areas in the state with below normal rainfall. If the dry weather hit when corn and soybean crops were filling their seeds, the seeds would be smaller than normal.

Dividing yield into its two components – the number of seeds per acre and the weight per seed (seed size) – helps us understand this relationship. The number of seeds the crop produces is determined by the productivity of the environment during flowering and seed set (Growth stage R1 to R5/R6 in soybean and roughly 20 days before and after silking in corn). A highly productive environment (no water stress or other limitations) during this critical period will produce a large number of seeds, while stress will reduce seed number by interfering with pollination or causing extra abortion of flowers and immature seeds.

The productivity of the environment during the seed-filling period will affect final seed size. A highly productive environment will produce large seeds, but water stress during seed filling will accelerate leaf senescence, shorten the seed-filling period, and reduce seed size. This probably happened in some fields in Kentucky that ran out of water during seed filling. A potentially high yield, assuming seed set occurred before the water ran out, was not realized because of stress during seed filling.

The effect of the weather (or any other stress) on yield is all about timing - what the crop is doing when its stressed will determine its effect on yield. The crop is most resilient to stress during vegetative growth. Reducing vegetative growth will not affect yield if the stress is relieved (e.g., it starts raining) and the crop recovers to produce enough leaves to completely cover the ground by flowering.

Stress during flowering and seed set will reduce seed number which can have a catastrophic effect on yield. However, the crop can compensate for the reduction in seed number by increasing seed size if there is no stress during seed filling. Unfortunately, there is a limit to the increase in seed size (you can't put a large ball bearing in a soybean pod), so the increase in size may not be enough to offset the reduction in seed number and completely prevent yield loss. Unfortunately, there is no limit on reductions in seed size. A limit on the upside, but not on the down! Isn't that the way it always is?

You can vary the timing of the critical stages by planting varieties/hybrids that differ in maturity or by varying planting dates. Short periods of stress may not hit the critical stages of the entire crop if the critical stages occur at different times. This approach lets you exploit the time by stress interaction to build a little stress resilience into your crop. Of course, this approach might cost you yield in years when a single variety/hybrid - planting date combination is stress free and hits the yield jackpot. Your choice depends upon whether you want to gamble on hitting an occasional home run when everything works out perfectly for a single variety/hybrid or if you want a little downside protection and are willing to settle for a single every at bat.

Just remember "There are no solutions, there are only tradeoffs; and you try to get the best tradeoff you can get, that's all you can hope for" (Thomas Sowell, American economist, economic historian, and social theorist, 1939 -).

Citation: Egli. D., 2025. Seed Size and Crop Yield in Kentucky in 2025. Kentucky Field Crops News, Vol 1, Issue 11. University of Kentucky, November 14, 2025.

Dr. Dennis Egli, UK Professor Emeritus
(859) 218-0753 degli@uly.edu

To England and Back Again: Growers Reflect on 1985 Sales Trip That Transformed Kentucky's Wheat Industry

Jennifer Elwell, M-G CAFE Marketing and Communications

This article was originally published in The Farmers Pride.

LEXINGTON, Ky. — Several of Kentucky's most influential grain crop leaders know the story of the "trip" to England that transformed wheat production.

Wayne Hunt, farmer and business owner in Hopkinsville, experienced it.

"Back then, we thought we were really good in this country, and then we went over and found out we weren't nearly as good as we thought we were," said Hunt, who joined the English wheat tour organized by Billy Joe Miles 40 years ago. "It put us in the wheat business."

Billy Joe Miles organizes a trip to England

Miles, the late agricultural enterprise giant and farmer from Owensboro, Kentucky, was a distributor for Imperial Chemical Industries (ICI) in England. While visiting the area in July 1985 — a trip offered as a sales award — Miles noticed the local wheat crop was significantly better than what was being grown in Western Kentucky.

In a *Wall Street Journal* article on the account, Miles was quoted as saying, "As soon as I saw that first field of wheat, I knew we had to do something at home. It was real dark green, much thicker than ours, real heavy head. I realized they had answers we didn't have. These are the best farmers in the world, in my opinion."

Miles prompted ICI to help him learn from British methods, which were achieving yields two to three times those in the U.S. He wanted to know ways to prevent wheat stalks from drooping and how to combat diseases such as rust and head scab.

Within weeks, Miles had convinced his cohorts — 23 Kentucky farmers, wheat experts and agribusiness professionals — to invest in airplane tickets and fly over, where they toured research facilities and local farms, including a demonstration farm run by British agricultural magazine, *Farmers Weekly*.

According to Hunt, the English farmers they visited put more effort into growing their wheat and were using more advanced tools at that time.

"I got in one of their combines, and behind the seat was a whole wall of computers," Hunt said, remembering his experience. "We got all that today, but it's amazing how far behind we were back then."

Of the experience, Hunt said it was one of the best learning trips he had ever been on. "It had such an impact," he said. "Billy Joe came back and put the information to use — a program that's still out there — and we got it all off of that trip."

Implementing change back home

Also on that trip was a young University of Kentucky wheat breeder, David Van Sanford. He had been hired in 1981 to develop soft red winter wheat varieties for the region. This was following the groundbreaking no-till research that had been established at UK in the late 1960s.

By the 1970s, agronomists Charles Tutt and James Herbek stationed at the UK Research and Education Center (UKREC) at Princeton had turned their attention to planting double-crop soybeans behind wheat.

Once Miles' group returned and understood the potential for intensively managed wheat, UK research followed suit. Herbek and Princeton-based soil scientist Lloyd Murdock, turned their attention to intensive and no-till wheat production.

Van Sanford, who is still breeding Kentucky wheat varieties, noted that several factors came together in the 1980s, setting Kentucky on a path to successful and profitable wheat production.

In addition to introducing new knowledge, Miles brought British agronomy experts to Kentucky, including Chris Bowley and Phil Needham, who continue to work with local farmers today.

"Suddenly, it seemed there was a critical mass of growers, researchers and consultants who wanted to put Kentucky on the map as a premier location for the production of high-quality soft red winter wheat," Van Sanford said.

Encouraged by the passionate farm leaders who participated in the England wheat tour, the multi-disciplinary Wheat Science Group was formed in the early 1990s at UK. Soils, genetics, pests and plant growth experts united to significantly raise the average wheat yields and no-till wheat acres in the Commonwealth.

Field days and workshops were held regularly to share the latest wheat production research and management information. Those events are still held today, thanks to support from the Kentucky Small Grain Growers Association (KySGGA).

"By bringing together farmers, researchers and industry partners, we've been able to improve yields, enhance crop quality and expand opportunities for Kentucky growers," said Laura Knoth, executive director of KySGGA. "We want to continue to help wheat farmers adapt to changes in the industry, with a focus on research, education and market development."

Siemer Milling: Kentucky wheat's next game-changer

As wheat production and quality improved in Western Kentucky, local markets began to develop.

"The real game-changer for Kentucky wheat was Siemer Milling Company opening a mill in Hopkinsville," Van Sanford said.

Siemer Milling, based in Teutopolis, Illinois, built the Kentucky facility in 1995. According to Brian Semple, vice president of grain supply for Siemer, the Hopkinsville mill produces approximately two million pounds of flour daily. Local farmers sell 12 to 13 million bushels of soft red winter wheat to the mill annually.

"We try to source from within a hundred to 120 miles of our mill," Semple said. "After it's milled, we make our flour to order, and it can go locally or all the way down to Georgia or Louisiana."

Semple said what makes Kentucky wheat special is the growers.

"The progressiveness of the growers and their willingness to live up to certain challenges that are proposed every year, whether it be environmental or market, helps produce a high-quality plant, which produces a high-quality wheat flour," Semple said.

Revisiting English wheat fields

Sam Halcomb, of Walnut Grove Farms in Adairville, thinks about that trip to England regularly as he passes by the 1985 group photo on his farm shop wall. His late father, Don, was on that trip and helped lead the charge to better wheat in Kentucky upon his return.

Halcomb said that his dad had often encouraged him and his brother, John, to revisit the same place that turned Kentucky wheat — pardon the pun — on its heads. Of particular interest to Don was Rothamsted, a non-profit agricultural research facility that was founded in 1843.

“My dad thought that there could be some good lessons learned from Rothamsted that would be applicable to Princeton in terms of becoming a world-renowned agronomic research facility,” Halcomb said, referring to the Princeton-based Grain and Forage Center of Excellence (GFCE).

Halcomb and several farmers, with the assistance of UK agronomy specialist and GFCE director Chad Lee, recently visited Rothamsted and the same area in East Anglia, England, that Miles, Hunt, and his father visited in 1985.

“It turned out to be a very fortuitous visit,” Sam Halcomb said. “They’ve been producing wheat in the area for centuries, and it was cool to see the harvest. While they usually harvest in late August or September, they were ahead of schedule this year because they had a hot and dry summer.”

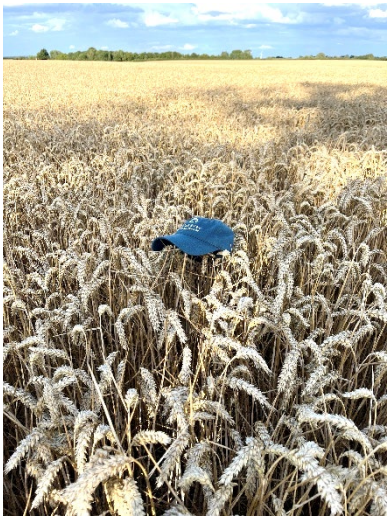

Figure 1 Wheat field near Wansford, England. The plants are strong enough to hold up a ballcap. Photo by Sam Halcomb.

Lee said that several farms they visited reported it was the earliest they had ever harvested.

“They expect to grow wheat for 11 months compared to our nine,” Lee said. “But what we saw was phenomenal. The wheat is much shorter than our wheat, and the heads are much larger. While there, we saw a yield of 120 to 130 bushels, and farmers were disappointed because the dry weather had slowed down their yield potential. They would much rather see 150 to 160 bushels per acre.”

According to the National Agricultural Statistics Service, the average wheat yield in Kentucky in 1985 was under 40 bushels per acre. In three of the last five years, the average wheat yield has been 80 bushels per acre or more.

While a few, yield-pursuing Kentucky producers can achieve more than 120 bushels per acre in a good year, Lee said the historical British weather and its global position allow for a longer grain fill period.

“I mean, clearly, in the last 40 years, we've not developed wheat that can grow for 11 months in Kentucky,” said Lee. “And because of our climate and where we are with the latitude and the sunlight, I don't know that we ever can. That would be a massive breakthrough in plant physiology if we could ever figure out how to stretch out the seed filling period. For our region, a lot of that gets determined by those factors, so maybe the big takeaway of all of it is that we've come a long way in those 40 years.”

Lee said he believes Kentucky farmers have a good understanding of how to intensively manage wheat and produce high-quality wheat in the current environment. While Kentucky has adopted a crop rotation system based on many years of research, he said there could still be more to learn from our trans-Atlantic neighbors.

“I would love to see some sort of larger farmer exchange where we visit some of the same farms in England and retrace more of the steps of what they did 40 years ago and then have some of those fellas come visit us,” Lee said. “I still think there are many things both groups of farmers can learn from each other.”

Citation: Elwell, J., 2025. To England and back again: Growers reflect on a 1985 sales trip that transformed Kentucky’s wheat industry. Kentucky Field Crops News, Vol 1, Issue 11. University of Kentucky, November 14, 2025.

Jennifer Elwell, M-G CAFE Marketing and Communications

Crop protection webinars continue through Nov. 20

Register now for multiple webinars focusing on agronomic crops and Integrated Pest Management. The University of Kentucky Martin-Gatton College of Agriculture, Food and Environment is presenting the 2025 Fall Crop Protection Webinar Series, hosted through the Southern Integrated Pest Management Center. The series began at 10 a.m. ET/9 a.m. CT on Thursday, Oct. 30, 2025, and continues Thursday mornings through Nov. 20 at the same time. Each webinar will be one hour in length. Continuing Education Units for certified crop advisors will include 1 CEU in Integrated Pest Management per webinar or 4 CEUs total for participation in all four webinars; Kentucky pesticide applicators will receive 1 CEU in Category 1A (Ag Plant) for each webinar attended.

The webinars are open to agriculture and natural resource county extension agents, crop consultants, farmers, industry professionals, and others, whether they reside or work in Kentucky or outside the state. Pre-registration is required by clicking on the links below.

Webinar #3: Nov. 13, 2025; 9 a.m. CT — Dr. Kiersten Wise, Extension Plant Pathologist
Title: Stopping Southern Rust: Scouting, Spraying, and Staying Ahead
Registration link: https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_uRGIZOK-T1KCnRBvU3LscA

Webinar #4: Nov. 20, 2025; 9 a.m. CT — Dr. Travis Legleiter, Extension Weeds Specialist
Title: Defense Wins the Ryegrass Battle
Registration link: https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_X72XkI21QzGKiX2BA9Ht6w

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Southern IPM Center

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Contact: Lori Rogers
lori.rogers@uky.edu
270-365-7541 Ext 21317

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FEBRUARY 3, 2025

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KCHC
Kentucky Crop Health Conference

9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. CST, Feb. 5, 2026 - National Corvette Museum - Bowling Green, Ky.

Horacio Lopez-Nicora
Ohio State University

Digging Deeper: Managing Soybean Cyst Nematode and Other Soilborne Pathogens

Jocelyn Smith
University of Guelph, Ridgetown

The Resurgence of European Corn Borer in Canada

Rodrigo Werle
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Targeted Herbicide Applications: Research Insights and Impact on the Future of Weed Control

Carl Bradley
University of Kentucky

Research update on Red Crown Rot of Soybean

Raul Villanueva
University of Kentucky

Update on Mollusk Management and Corn Leafhoppers

Travis Legleiter
University of Kentucky

The Battle Against Ryegrass Continues

Kiersten Wise
University of Kentucky

Winning the Battle Against Corn Disease

Matthew Springer
University of Kentucky

Multiple Methods to Reduce Wildlife Losses in Row Crop Production

Breakfast and lunch included — Sign-in begins at 8 a.m. CST
Scan QR Code or visit: https://kchc2026.eventbrite.com
Tickets non-refundable after January 29, 2026

Credits: CCA: 6 CEUs in IPM;
KY Pesticide Applicator: 5 CEUs for Category 1A; 1 CEU for Category 10
Tennessee Applicator credits available

Upcoming Events

2025

4-part Series	**Fall Crop Protection Webinar Series**	
Nov 13, 2025	#3 Stopping Southern Rust: Scouting, Spraying, & Staying Ahead	
Nov 20, 2025	#4 Defense Wins the Ryegrass Battle	
Dec. 15-16, 2025	**Drone Pilot Certification Training**	**Madisonville, KY**

2026

Jan. 15, 2026	**KY Commodity Conference**	**Bowling Green, KY**
Feb. 3, 2026	**Winter Wheat Meeting**	**Hopkinsville, KY**
Feb. 5, 2026	**2026 Kentucky Crop Health Conference**	**Bowling Green, KY**
Feb 26, 2026	**Pattern Drone Testing**	**Princeton, KY**
Mar 26, 2026	**Italian Ryegrass Field Tour**	**Princeton, KY**
Mar (TBA)	**Soil Properties Workshop at Spindletop**	**Lexington, KY**
May 12, 2026	**UK Wheat Field Day**	**Princeton, KY**
May 28, 2026	**Crop Scouting Clinic**	**Princeton, KY**
Jun 25, 2026	**Pest Management Field Day**	**Princeton, KY**
Jul 21, 2026	**UK Corn, Soybean & Tobacco Field Day**	**Princeton, KY**
Jul 23, 2026	**High School Crop Scouting Competition**	**Princeton, KY**
Aug 27, 2026	**Pest Management Workshop**	**Princeton, Ky**
TBA	**Drone Pilot Certification Workshop**	**Madisonville, KY**