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Soybean Harvest Approaching

Almost a decade ago, a group of University of Nebraska Extension Educators collected moisture samples from 115 truckloads of soybeans at elevator delivery. Close to 20 percent were below ten percent moisture and almost forty percent were below 11 percent. Maybe that's not a big deal - until you think about the fact 11 percent moisture soybeans represent a three plus percent yield loss versus harvest at our standard 13 percent moisture. While we know we can't harvest *every* acre at the optimum moisture, doing a few little things *can* help out at least a little.

Start by at considering harvest at a higher moisture level – say 14/15 percent. Soybeans are fully mature when 95 percent of the pods are at a mature tan color, likely with some leaves still left on the plant. That may mean more combine adjustments (even throughout the day as conditions change) and slower harvest speeds, but if those adjustments can be implemented without sacrificing in other areas that cost you money, they could be a consideration.

Harvest under optimum conditions, including hours when it may be possible to capture overnight moisture that may also help to reduce shattering losses. Four to five beans on the ground per square foot adds up, equaling almost a bushel per acre in losses.

Keep in mind as you look to harvest that soybeans dry down a fair bit faster than corn. Work by KSU Farming Systems Specialist Dr. Ignacio Ciampitti looked at the moisture content of soybeans during different growth stages, focusing on the dry down time from black layer to harvest. They found that from mid-late September through mid-October, the dry down rate (from 58 to 12 percent moisture) was around 3 percent per day, taking just 15 days in many cases. Temperature, humidity, and overall water content at black layer formation (maturity) will certainly affect this dry down, but the dry down often occurs quicker than we think.

There's a lot to balance during harvest. Soybean harvest moisture is just one consideration, but it deserves at least a little attention to see how big of a factor it may be in maximizing soybean yield – and revenue.