



Soybean TAg Teams for Dairies

The Need

In 2012, a record 340,000 acres of soybeans were planted in NYS, up 26% from just three years ago. Sixty percent of which was grown in the ten counties covered by the NWNY Dairy, Livestock, & Field Crops Team. Soybean acreage continues to expand on dairy farms as producers are looking to grow their own source of protein to reduce feed costs. To maximize production, education is needed on best production practices for this “new” crop on the dairy. Tactical Ag (TAg) Teams have been an effective teaching model for bringing small groups of producers together in a hands-on approach by using their fields as outdoor classrooms. The principles of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and improved crop production practices have been the educational focus of the TAg program.

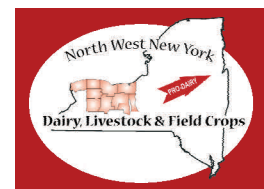


Extension's Response

The NWNY Team partnered on a grant with the NY Soybean Board which utilizes NY soybean check-off dollars. In 2011 & 2012, two “Small Dairy Soybean TAg Teams” were established and coordinated by the NWNY Team in Yates and Ontario Counties. These two teams had 14 participants from thirteen dairy farms. Collectively, these producers grew over 400 acres of soybeans. Throughout the growing season, teams met five times to observe and discuss current field scenarios and possible threats to soybeans on their farms. Participant farms served as open classrooms and pest management and crop cultural practices were viewed and discussed in the field. Participants were given a folder of handouts and reference materials which complimented the topics being covered each month. Even though there was a heavy emphasis on pest management, other topics included plant populations, planting depth, soybean growth stages, variety and maturity groups, fertility, tillage, harvest and storage. A summer scout was hired and each TAg members' soybean field was scouted weekly throughout the growing season. If weeds, diseases or insects were found to be at damaging levels, growers were contacted and we worked with them on a one-on-one basis. Results of the scouting reports were used as a springboard for discussion at each meeting.

The Results

Participants learned how to correctly identify, sample, assess, and apply different management tools on potential soybean pests including insects, weeds and diseases. The weekly scouting visits also encouraged members to begin their own sampling programs and become more familiar with their crops. Those producers who were certified pesticide applicators earned eight NYS-DEC continuing education credits towards their pesticide license. Pre and post-tests were given at the first and last meetings of the year to measure any impact our TAg program may have had on the knowledge base of our TAg members. Collectively, these 13 participants increased their general knowledge of soybean integrated pest and crop management by 32%. Armed with these new skills, these producers can now effectively reduce pest populations, maximize plant yield potential, and reduce purchased feed costs. All agreed that they would highly recommend this program to other soybean producers.



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