

To: Local News

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Topdressing Wheat with Nitrogen

For the most part and regardless of crop conditions, now is a good time to start planning for topdressing nitrogen. Some key elements that need to be considered when deciding on the exact program you plan to use include timing, N source, application method and N rate. Ideally, the N in topdress applications will be moved into the root zone with precipitation well before jointing begins in order to be most efficiently utilized by wheat. With some of the small wheat out there with limited tillers, having adequate N available to support spring tillering when it breaks dormancy will be important. Also, the potential number of kernels per head is determined right after spring green-up and prior to jointing; thus, having available N in the root zone can help ensure a good yield potential. For the well-drained, medium- to fine-textured soils that dominate our wheat acres, the odds of losing much of the N that is topdress-applied in the winter is low. For these soils, topdressing can begin anytime now, and usually the earlier the better. Keep in mind that N should not be applied to the soil surface when the ground is deeply frozen and especially when snow covered. Most topdressing is broadcast applied. In high-residue situations, this can result in some immobilization of N, especially where liquid UAN is used. If no herbicides are applied with the N, producers can get some benefit from applying the N in a dribble band on 15- to 18-inch centers. This can minimize immobilization and may provide for a more consistent crop response. The typical sources of N used for topdressing wheat are UAN solution and dry urea. Numerous trials by K-State over the years have shown that both are equally effective. However, if producers plan to tank-mix with a herbicide, they will have to use liquid UAN and broadcast it. Remember that topdressing should complement or supplement the N applied in the fall and the residual soil N present in the soil. The total N application, planting and topdressing, should equal the target recommended rate. If the wheat was grazed this fall and winter, producers should add an additional 30-40 lbs. N/acre for every 100 lbs. of beef weight gain removed from the field. If conditions are favorable for heavy fall and/or spring grazing, additional N maybe necessary, especially for a grain crop.