HEATHER DARBY – SOYBEAN RESEARCH PROFILE

Farmer Blog



Heather Darby, Extension Professor, Agronomic and Soils Specialist, University of Vermont Extension

Why did you decide to pursue a career that includes soybean research?
I grew up on a Vermont dairy farm, and always loved agriculture. I thought I would be a dairy farmer, but my mom made me go to college. At that point, I thought I knew everything about cows. Because I didn't know everything about plants and soils, I decided to study agronomy. Now I love that I am helping farmers stay viable and achieve their goals, and soybeans have become an important part of that. I find it exciting to answer new questions from farmers and make a difference for them.

What research topic have you completed in the past or are working on now that could have or has had the most significant impact on soybean production?
The northeast region has traditionally had low soybean production. As soybean acres increase, all my research is impactful because it's a new crop. Farmers, consultants, seed dealers and others in local agriculture need lots of information to ensure the crop is successful, so all my basic research on varieties and best practices has been valuable. Now we are addressing more advanced questions related to cover crops, nitrogen management and more, and learning what practices make sense here.

How has the soybean checkoff enhanced your ability to find answers to production problems for farmers?
If it wasn't for these dollars, I don't know how else I would get soybean research funded. Area farmers need practical information, so the checkoff is critical here. It is very, very much appreciated.

Within your area of expertise, what are the top two or three general recommendations you would offer farmers to improve their management practices?

First, farmers need to select the right soybean variety for the environment. Then, they need to manage planting timing, especially because our growing season is relatively short. Pay attention to the basics of planting first, to be sure to get those right.

Within your area of expertise, what do you consider to be critical soybean research needs that can impact the profitability of famers in the future?
A big issue here is climate. Farmers deal with weather variability, and they need to manage soybeans and other crops under more erratic conditions. We need research to find the tools and practices farmers need to adapt. They need answers to the question "What do you do when what's always worked doesn't work anymore?" That is the type of research we need to provide.

SRIN Articles:

When Planting Time is Short: Flexible Cover Crop Termination Strategies

When Harvest Time is Short: Interseeding Cover Crops in Short-Season Soybeans

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