

CONNOR SIBLE – SOYBEAN RESEARCH PROFILE



Farmer Blog



Connor Sible, research assistant professor, University of Illinois-Champaign

Why did you decide to pursue a career that includes soybean research?

I grew up in a small, northern Illinois town. Although I did not grow up on a farm, I was surrounded by a farming community with many family friends who were farmers. In college, I started studying ag engineering with the goal to someday work for John Deere or Case. I realized early that engineering was not for me, so I switched to the biology side of agriculture. I found research through my college internships, one of which was for a chemical company doing small-plot research and I thought that was a cool and interesting career path. From there, I pursued my graduate studies in agricultural research.

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?

When I started graduate school, biologicals/biostimulants were taking off in the industry. My graduate work and my post-doctoral work were in this space, looking at what farmers can add to the field that can increase yield potential. I've worked mostly on helping farmers to understand what these crop additives are, with a secondary focus on looking at their effectiveness. I consider myself a 'yield scientist,' and I try to influence soybean yields, which has led to looking at yield beyond just inputs, but to see the influence of practices as well.

How has the soybean checkoff enhanced your ability to find answers to production problems for farmers?

A huge benefit of the checkoff is outreach. It helps me expand my research impact beyond Illinois. Also, research ideas come from the checkoff's farmer board members, who help decide what research projects are funded. So, when our projects are selected, it's coming from farmer interest and concern. This ensures the research projects are in line with farmer needs. Our research must come back to help the farmer in the end.

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 should look at their farming history. Have they changed any management with soybeans? If they haven't, it's time to think about it. Soybeans have a lot of potential that farmers who haven't updated their management may be missing.

Second, look for the simplest change to make that won't require a massive equipment overhaul or large management approach. Soybean breeding and genetics have come a long way. Have they been using the same maturity group for their region for the last 15 years? It costs no more to move up .2 or .3 MG. Also, they should review the variety they've been using and whether it is still working well. There could be a new variety to use, which doesn't cost anything to change beyond the value of the seed.

Third, look at yield levels. Farmers should adjust fertility management for the yield levels of today. This is where tissue testing can be an asset to indicate if nutrient levels are short or not.

Within your area of expertise, what do you consider to be critical soybean research needs that can impact the profitability of farmers in the future?

I believe soybean yield is nitrogen-limited. A big challenge is that we know we can't pour on nitrogen and at the same time farmers are trying to reduce nitrogen use across their acres. If we can find a way to enhance nitrogen fixation in soybeans, it could solve the nitrogen limitation problem and suddenly 100-bushel soybeans will be more achievable.

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