EMERSON NAFZIGER – SOYBEAN RESEARCH PROFILE

Farmer Blog



Emerson Nafziger, professor emeritus and Extension agronomist, University of Illinois

Why did you decide to pursue a career that includes soybean research?
I worked on soybean physiology for my master's degree and worked to introduce soybean as a crop in Bangladesh for several years back in the 1970s. It's a nutritionally miraculous crop, and one that presents great management questions as yields continue to rise.

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?
We've looked at all aspects of production including row spacing, seeding rate, nitrogen fertilizer and foliar fungicides, all in trying to answer the question of whether or not we can predict when spending money for "optional" management practices will pay, particularly with current varieties. Our rotation x tillage research has shown that tillage may increase soybean yields slightly, but often not enough to pay for the tillage operation.

How has the soybean checkoff enhanced your ability to find answers to production problems for farmers?
In Illinois, support from the checkoff helped us to answer many of the applied research questions in soybean production.

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

- *Plant early when conditions permit but be reasonable about it. March is generally not a very favorable time to plant.*
- *Plant 130,000-140,000 seeds per acre. Do not cut rates in an attempt to save cost.*
- *Soybeans in 15- or 20-inch rows often yield more than those in 30-inch rows in Illinois, but not always enough more to justify adding another planter.*

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?
Farmers are bombarded with products like microbial inoculants that have not been shown to consistently increase yields. These often do not address known deficiencies or crop needs, and most do not produce visible evidence of activity. Research cannot rule out that such products work at least sometimes, but it would be helpful to have performance data to guide decisions.

SOYBEAN RESEARCH & INFORMATION NETWORK

This website is funded by the soybean checkoff

©2026 Soybean Research & Information Network