SHAWN HAWKINS – SOYBEAN RESEARCH PROFILE

Farmer Blog



Shawn Hawkins, Professor of Biosystems Engineering and Soil Science, University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture

Why did you decide to pursue a career that includes soybean research?
I earned my degrees in chemical and environmental engineering, and I worked in hazardous waste removal for years. My advanced studies included focus on how bacteria grow. After earning my doctorate degree, I saw a job posting for an extension position. Though I didn't really understand what it was, it sounded like the perfect fit for me. I express dense information in ways that make sense to farmers. I enjoy working with farmers and helping them. Now I focus on animal waste management, offering a valuable service to soybean and corn farmers. I enjoy the applied research needed to answer their questions, which includes research on manure management and soybeans.

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?
My research on the direct application of poultry litter for soybean production has the most potential to help farmers. For first-time users of poultry litter as fertilizer, the data from this research will help answer their practical questions so they can maximize the value of that input.

How has the soybean checkoff enhanced your ability to find answers to production problems for farmers?
The soy checkoff is critical. My research projects operate on a shoestring budget, and replicate soil, plant tissue and harvested grain tests are expensive. The checkoff is the only outside source of funding available for hard costs like the analysis for more than 100 soil samples at a time. Checkoff funding makes it possible for me to do impactful work and provide valuable research data efficiently.

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

- *Soil test! They are important to a farmer's bottom line. Soil tests allow producers to apply agronomic, economical nutrients at rates that support profitability.*
- *Fertilize crops based on soil tests and field history, regardless of the type of fertilizer used. But understand fertilizer options and choose a source that provides maximum value for field and crop needs.*

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?
Farmers are expressing lots of interest in variable rate potassium (K) application. This is an area where research about split and variable rate applications would help farmers nail down best practices.

SRIN articles:

Assessing the Fertilizer Fit of Poultry Litter

SOYBEAN RESEARCH & INFORMATION NETWORK

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