

# VIRGINIA SYKES – SOYBEAN RESEARCH PROFILE



Virginia Sykes, Associate Professor of Plant Sciences, University of Tennessee Knoxville

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

*Soybeans have a big impact, as they are widely grown in Tennessee and throughout the U.S. and are used in so many products. As an added benefit, soybeans are short and harvested when temperatures are comfortable, making them my favorite crop!*

## **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 has mostly focused on the ecological and economic impacts of management practices like crop rotation, cover crops and double crops. Understanding the short- and long-term impacts of these practices and how to use them to make soybeans more profitable and sustainable will ultimately benefit farmers for years. I also manage the Tennessee Soybean Variety Trials, which provide valuable data every year that helps farmers pick the best varieties for their fields.*

## **How has the Soy Checkoff enhanced your ability to find answers to production problems for farmers?**

*The Soy Checkoff provides good guidance for what is most relevant to farmers. I get lots of input on research projects and what they want to learn more about. Plus, the funding is critical to gathering preliminary data to support larger proposals and maintaining important extension efforts like the variety trials I manage each year, which farmers highly value.*

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

*Don't be afraid to try something new, but don't bet the whole farm on that new practice. Start small and remember that the extension system is here to help. I love talking to farmers who are interested in research and testing things on their own, to help them figure out how*

*best to learn what can improve their operation.*

**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?**

*Breeders do an amazing job advancing lines with new and improved traits, but variety evaluation will always be important, as it helps farmers and industry identify where those varieties can make the biggest impact. We can't stop at just varieties and yields, though. We are dealing with systems where profitability and long-term sustainability rely on so much more than just yield. It will be increasingly important to focus on whole systems, combining new technology with traditional practices like no-till, cover crops, double crops and crop rotations that allow us to minimize inputs while still maintaining productive and profitable systems.*

**SRIN articles:**

[Double Cropping Soybeans and Pennycress for Sustainable Fuel](#)

[Mid-South Soybean Variety Trials: A New Resource for Farmers](#)



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