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**AS ASIAN SOYBEAN RUST PROBLEM MOUNTS NATIONALLY
GROWERS SHOULD THINK ABOUT INCREASING CROP PROTECTION
Crop Insurance Available to Insure Against Losses**

Woodstown – The United States Department of Agriculture’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) confirmed on Nov. 10 that Asian soybean rust disease has surfaced for the first time in this country. The fungus was found on leaf samples from two plots of land on a Louisiana State University research farm. Fortunately, a majority of the U.S. soybean crop had been harvested by that time so its impact on the fall soybean harvest was nominal.

However, as growers are gearing up for spring planting over these winter months they may want to think about increasing protection for their soybean crop with the purchase of crop insurance or increased levels of coverage. Currently, the only management tool is the careful application of fungicides, which can be costly and which must be applied early in order to be most effective in combating the disease.

USDA’s Risk Management Agency noted that production losses associated with unavoidable plant diseases such as soybean rust are a covered peril under the Course Grains Crop Provisions. Crop losses that can be attributed to soybean rust are insurable provided that a grower can verify that the cause was natural and available control measures were properly applied. If adequate control measures are not taken or if a grower chooses not to use available control measures then it would not be a covered loss.

The USDA is reminding growers of their responsibility to stay informed regarding soybean rust outbreaks. More locally, Bill Bamka, agricultural agent for Rutgers Cooperative Extension, remarked, “Growers need to be aware of control strategies and recommendations as they become available for soybean rust.”

Soybean rust is a disease largely spread by wind-borne spores that can be carried over long distances. Bamka also noted that seed-borne transmission has not been a documented cause of the spread of this disease.

APHIS reported that the active hurricane season experienced in the US over the last year may have been a contributing factor in why this disease was found in North America. Soybean rust is native to eastern Australia, eastern Asia, Japan, Taiwan, and the Philippines, but it is a disease on the move. It was found in Africa in 1997 and spread throughout most of the continent. Next, it was found in Paraguay in 2001 and then spread to Argentina and Brazil. The overall concern is that the disease can spread rapidly and has been known to cause from a 10 to 80% loss in yields.

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Soybean Rust/2

Now soybean rust has reached North America, which is the last major soybean-producing area in the world to be affected by the disease. By Dec. 1, it had been found in nine states including Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, Missouri, South Carolina and Tennessee.

According to APHIS, symptoms that growers should be aware of include: small lesions on the lower leaves of the infected plant that increase in size and change color from gray to tan or reddish brown on the underside of the leaves. Lesions can also appear on petioles, stems, and pods. It is recommended that growers monitor soybean fields and adjacent areas throughout the growing season. Early detection is key to controlling and treating the disease since it can overwinter in soybeans or legume crops such as green beans, kidney beans or lima beans. Although kudzu is the major host to be concerned with, said Bamka, since it is an aggressive weed with a major presence in the South and can serve as a reservoir for overwintering soybean rust spores.

To prepare for the potential spread of soybean rust, the New Jersey Department of Agriculture and Rutgers Cooperative Extension are also currently working with the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection to apply for emergency exemptions through a Section 18 with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The request is for the approval of additional fungicides for use in controlling and treating soybean rust. Two fungicides are currently labeled for use, but measures must be taken now to ensure an adequate supply is available for future use should soybean rust persist in this country.

Growers who are concerned about the potential for soybean rust to spread into the Mid-Atlantic region should contact local Extension offices for advice on production recommendations. APHIS is also recommending that growers document any actions taken concerning soybean rust, including advice or counsel provided by local or recognized Extension personnel or other agronomic experts.

In 2004, New Jersey producers grew a total of 98,000 acres of soybeans. According to the National Agricultural Statistics Service, in Oct. 2004 New Jersey's soybean yield also set a new record high of 42 bushels per acre. The value of New Jersey's soybean crop in 2003 was \$20.9 million.

Of the 98,000 acres planted in soybeans, some 76,184 acres were covered by crop insurance. The sales closing date to purchase crop insurance for soybeans is March 15, 2005. Contact a crop insurance agent for more details about how to insure a crop and to receive quotes on crop insurance policies.

The Garden State Crop Insurance Education Initiative is a joint program between the Risk Management Agency, United States Department of Agriculture; Rutgers Cooperative Extension; and the New Jersey Department of Agriculture.

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