

Central Region: Tom Austin, Minneapolis — Yield: 104.82 bushels per acre

Tom Austin always thought that farmers could grow 80- 100-bushel per acre wheat in north central Kansas. He is just surprised that it happened this year.

“We had good moisture through March, but then it got really dry,” says Austin, whose field of WestBred Armour yielded 104.82 bushels per acre. “I was shocked. I thought that we’d be in the 70s. I had no idea it was going to yield that much.”

Austin attributes his success this year to timely fertilizer applications that included micronutrients. He started the crop off with certified Armour seed, dropping about 1.25 million seeds per acre and adding about 30 pounds of phosphate via 11-52-0 fertilizer with the drill. “I seldom put too much nitrogen on in the fall,” Austin explains. “I don’t want too many tillers, so I just put on a few pounds of nitrogen with the 11-52-0.”

Instead, Austin postpones the bulk of fertilizer applications until the crop begins to come out of winter dormancy. He applied 75 pounds of dry fertilizer in the spring, followed by a liquid topdress solution that included 0.9 ounces of Olympus herbicide to control grassy weeds; 30 pounds of nitrogen, plus 32 ounces of zinc; 16 ounces of copper; 2 ounces of molybdenum, and 5 pounds of magnesium sulfate.

Austin believes yield potential can be maximized by adding micronutrients such as zinc, copper, and sulfur. However, it takes time and discipline to determine whether the added products will pay off. Soil tests are conducted frequently. Austin also has added tissue test samples to his fertilizer management regimen.

“A few weeks after wheat greens up in the spring, I take about 50 plants, put them in a paper bag, and send them to a laboratory,” he explains. “They sent back several recommendations, and I had my crop consultant, Matt Hagny, refine those. If a farmer gets the sample done early enough in the spring, he can put any nutrients needed on in time for that wheat crop. Otherwise, he’ll have to wait until next year to apply those nutrients.”

Hagny works mainly with no-till farmers. Austin does use no-till, but the contest field was conventionally tilled continuous wheat. “I take Matt’s recommendations and transfer them to my conventional-till fields,” Austin says.

The Ottawa County farmer says the Yield Contest serves as added incentive for pushing yields. “I entered mainly for the challenge, to see how far I can push things. I don’t think a lot of farmers realize that their yield potential is so much greater than what they are currently getting,” he says.

