Soybean Shatter

One of the most recent problems producers have been having is loss of soybeans at harvest due to shattering. When the soybean pods are dry and brittle, the pods can crack open leaving the soybeans to fall to the ground rather than to be taken up into the combine. In normal years the loss can be about 10 percent, however this year; due to the drought the losses may be much higher.

Researchers from the University of Illinois and University of Minnesota hypothesize that the shatter may be higher this year because the pods are weaker due to swelling of the beans. The beans that matured early did not get the benefit of late season rains in filling the seeds. The rains instead caused the beans to swell with moisture and when the weather dried the beans, the swelling and contracting of the beans weakened the pods causing them to be more brittle and apt to shatter. Another theory put forth is that the shattering is a mechanism of survival for the plant.

Soybeans growth is highly dependent on day length. With the days getting shorter and the cooler weather, the soybeans are reaching maturity very quickly. As the drought is continuing the pods are drying out quickly as well. Producers need to harvest their beans as soon as they reach 13 percent moisture. The beans should also be harvested as close to the ground as possible without damaging equipment or taking up soil, rocks and other debris. Also, consider harvesting early in the morning or soon after a rain when the moisture in the pods may help to prevent shatter. These precautions will help to eliminate the loss of beans due to shatter.

In Missouri there are a number of producers that are harvesting finding that shattering is a big problem this year. This problem is in a large part of the Midwest. An article from Wisconsin reported some producers are estimating they are losing up to $90 an acre worth of soybeans as a result of shatter. This problem will continue past the 2012 harvest into 2013 by causing voluntary beans in the fields that will need to be dealt with.

More information and the research on the practices I have discussed as well as on many more subjects can be found in your local extension office. So if you would like further information on this or any other topic contact your local University of Missouri Extension office. University of Missouri and Extension programs are open to all. Thank you for your time.