Fungicide Efficacy Trial Promotes Agent Training Through Experiential Learning

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Peanut is an important Suwannee River Valley commodity crop. In 2018, 66,246 acres of peanuts were planted in counties adjacent to the North Florida Research and Education Center (NFREC) – Suwannee Valley. An applied peanut disease research program was established to address disease management needs of this commodity. Objectives: To (1) assess the efficacy of commonly used peanut fungicide programs, and (2) provide local Extension agents with experiential learning opportunities related to disease management. Methods: UF/IFAS Plant Pathologist, Nicholas Dufault and UF/IFAS Hamilton County Extension agent, Keith Wynn collaborated with NFREC – Suwannee Valley staff in 2015 to incorporate replicated small plot fungicide trials at the center. This trial evolved into a yearly research program that evaluates the efficacy of various fungicide programs related to Peanut Rx. Dr. Dufault is responsible for determining the fungicides tested, retrieving chemicals, and interpreting data collected from the trials. Local Extension agents are responsible for applying fungicide applications, taking disease ratings and assisting in the data interpretation. Results: Data collected from disease ratings and yields are used to generate fact sheets, publications, and presentations that are distributed in production meetings throughout the state. Extension agents receive hands-on training with fungicide application methods and disease identification which increases their confidence when interacting with producers. Conclusions: This research allowed Extension agents to provide producers with timely information about fungicide product efficacy and monitor diseases throughout the season. Because of these trials, producers have seen the benefit of incorporating novel fungicides into their management programs and adjusting their management plans to the pathogens present.