

MISSISSIPPI SOYBEAN PROMOTION BOARD

MISSISSIPPI SOYBEAN PROMOTION BOARD PROJECT NO. 04-2018 (YEAR 1) 2018 ANNUAL REPORT

Title: Cover Crop – Minimal Tillage Production System Evaluation

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BACKGROUND & OBJECTIVES

Cover crops and minimal tillage (CCMT) production systems have seen increased adoption and interest in recent years. Identifying and understanding yield factors and relationships in high-yielding soybean production systems calls for an innovative approach to on-farm research. A systems agronomy approach was used to evaluate yield factors and relationships on six split field sites in the Mississippi Delta representing Commerce, Dundee, and Forestdale soil series. Each land-leveled and furrow-irrigated field was divided to implement a CCMT system on half of the field while the cooperating grower continued to farm the other half using their best management practices (Farmers Best Management – FBM). Project objectives are summarized as follows:

- 1) Implement a systems agronomy research approach to identify yield limiting/driving factors.
- 2) Assess insect, disease, and weed presence, and document threshold-based treatments.
- 3) Evaluate soil water characteristics to improve sensor placement and irrigation scheduling.
- 4) Assess *Rhizobia* and N fixation potential of soils to improve nitrogen management strategies in high-yielding soybean production systems.

KEY FINDINGS YEAR ONE

1. “Planting green” into cover crops significantly reduced yield. No significant difference in yield when covers terminated 4-6 weeks prior to planting.
2. Data suggest yield reductions may relate to stand establishment and early season growth.
3. No difference in threshold-based insect, disease, or weed prescriptions between CCMT and FBM.

Management Implications and Considerations

1. A two-pass herbicide program is recommended if terminating cover crops at planting. Apply a systemic herbicide application (e.g. glyphosate) at least 48 hours preplant, followed by a contact herbicide application (e.g. paraquat) plus any pre-emerge products at planting. This two-pass approach has been very successful in terminating tall and/or high biomass cover crops.
2. Cover crop residue management around the seed furrow should be considered when managing for a potential high yield crop. Residue in the seed trench can result in uneven emergence and yield potential loss in corn. “Shark Tooth” style row cleaners modified with a plate to cover 80% of the “tooth” has been the most effective option in moving residue with minimal wrapping observed to date.
3. High biomass cover crops may reduce both nutrient availability and soil temperature at planting. The use of an in-furrow starter fertilizer may improve stand establishment and early season development.

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SUMMARY REPORT OF PROGRESS/ACTIVITY

Six split field sites meeting the criteria listed above were planted into a winter cover crop mix of cereal rye, black oats, hairy vetch, and winter pea. Cover crops were drilled into raised beds prepared in the fall of 2017 and subsequently planted into corn (3 fields) and soybean (3 fields). All fields were sampled/monitored through the 2018 growing season and harvested with spatially-referenced yield data successfully collected on 5 of the 6 farms.

The crop yield summary in **Table 1** below shows significant yield reductions when planting into a green cover crop (i.e. termination at planting). Early cover crop termination (4-6 weeks preplant) in corn did not result in a significant difference in yield, although the FBM treatment yielded slightly higher. Not presented in Table 1 are the results from the Dundee 1 field site where spatial yield data were not collected. However, scale tickets provided by the cooperating farmer indicate that the CCMT treatment yielded an average of 66 bu/acre while the FBM yielded 63 bu/acre.

Table 1. Crop yield summary by treatment.

Commerce 2 / Forestdale 1 - Planted Green			Dundee 2 - Planted Green		
Treatment	Yield (corn)	Std. Dev.	Treatment	Yield (soybean)	Std. Dev.
CCMT	210 b	16.1	CCMT	77 b	4.7
FBM	240 a	13.8	FBM	92 a	5.5
Commerce 1 - Early Termination			Forestdale 2 - Planted Green		
CCMT	209	13.8	CCMT	62 b	5.9
FBM	214	19.5	FBM	77 a	5.1

Objective 1 – Implement a Systems Agronomy research approach to identify yield factors.

Crop yield reductions in “planted green” scenarios were anticipated. The aim of Objective 1 was to identify factors contributing to these yield reductions in order to improve yield in subsequent years. Yield factor analysis in year one was based on fixed and spatially-referenced sampling points established on a 1-acre grid. Because of the high variability in alluvial soils, only planter and yield data falling within a radius equivalent to 1 header width (**Appendix Figure 1**) were used for analysis.

Point based analysis was utilized given the lack of confidence in uniform interpolation of soil test and plant tissue data outward from the sampling location. However, management zones (currently under development) will be utilized in year two for data interpolation and to conduct yield factor analysis at a much higher spatial resolution (38 x 38 ft grid). For the initial yield factor analysis, 138 measured data variables (e.g. soil, tissue, planter) were plotted against yield by field, farm, crop, and treatment scales resulting in over 2,750 scenarios. Data variables are listed and described in Appendix Table 1. Output from this analysis was ranked based on goodness of fit and variables that may help explain yield factors are summarized below.

Corn

1. Yield increased with % clean furrow when evaluated across treatments. However, CCMT fields planted green showed increased variability and decreasing yield with % clean furrow. We suspect this is due to lower cover crop biomass on the bottom of the fields (due to winter flooding), and the tendency for these portions of the field to be inherently lower yielding. This further supports the need for management zone development and use in analysis.

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2. Yield increased with soil test and plant tissue phosphorous and potassium across treatments.

Soybeans

1. Seedling emergence and stand development delays were observed in both “planted green” scenarios. These early delays carried into the growing season with CCMT soybeans 10-14 days behind FBM soybeans in growth stage and maturity.
 - a. Planting dates coincided with the beginning of a “dry spell” where no measurable rainfall occurred for approximately 2 weeks. Cover crop water use may have contributed to delayed emergence. Slugs were also an issue on the Dundee 2 CCMT field.
2. Within the Dundee 2 site data, no soil fertility interactions were observed between CCMT and FBM treatments.
 - a. Across both treatments, sodium at 6-12 inches exhibited and negative relationship with yield. Positive relationships with yield were observed in plant tissue calcium, manganese, phosphorous, and sulfur.
3. Within the Forestdale 2 site data, no soil fertility interactions were observed between CCMT and FBM treatments.
 - a. Across both treatments, positive relationships between soil test calcium, plant tissue calcium, plant tissue manganese, and yield were observed. Plant tissue phosphorus and copper exhibited a negative relationship with yield.

Unsupervised machine learning was also conducted to determine if multiple variables, or interactions among variables, could be considered as potential yield factors. Different combinations of independent variables resulted in 18 unique input datasets on which Principal Component and Self Organizing Map analyses were performed to identify clusters within the data. In summary, the data set (based on 242 sample locations across six farms) contained too much unaccounted-for variability (e.g. identification of historically poor yielding areas, low spots) for these methods to provide any meaningful results.

Conducting on-farm research is technically challenging but can provide relevant and applicable results when performed properly. In fulfilling Objective 1, on-farm research methodologies and approaches will be improved. Two areas of improvement slated for year two are summarized below.

1. Develop management zones using electrical conductivity (measured through Electromagnetic Induction), elevation, and yield stability analysis as base criteria.
2. Develop methodology for multivariate classification of farming systems.

Objective 2 – Assess insect, disease, and weed presence, and document threshold-based treatments.

Southern Ag consultants scouted trial fields weekly. Field records were documented and spatially referenced using tools developed through ArcGIS Online. No insect, disease, or weed issues specific to CCMT systems was observed.

Objective 3 – Evaluate soil water characteristics to improve sensor placement and irrigation scheduling.

Soil moisture probes were installed and operated on trial fields to support irrigation scheduling throughout the 2018 growing season. The probes installed were Sentek “Drill & Drop” probes in both 36” and 48” length which contain volumetric moisture sensors at 4-inch depth increments. 28 additional probes were installed post-harvest, operated through the winter, and pulled immediately pre-planting in

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2019. These probes were installed at an approximate density of one per five acres on four farms, with a minimum of one probe placed in each mapped soil unit occurring in the field. Soil cores were planned for extraction and analysis during the fall/winter of 2018/19. However, wet field conditions since harvest have prevented this activity from taking place. Soil cores will be extracted for analysis as soon as field conditions allow.

Objective 4 – Assess *Rhizobia* and N fixation potential of soils to improve nitrogen management strategies in high-yielding soybean production systems.

Soil samples from corn and soybean sites were collected, the DNA extracted for 16S (bacteria) and 18S (fungi) rRNA, and queued for sequencing via Mississippi State University Soil Microbial Ecology & Metagenomics Lab. A group of N cycle taxa, which includes N-fixing *Rhizobia*, will be annotated using MG-RAST and the N fixation potential assessed by means of functional genomic analysis.

Appendix

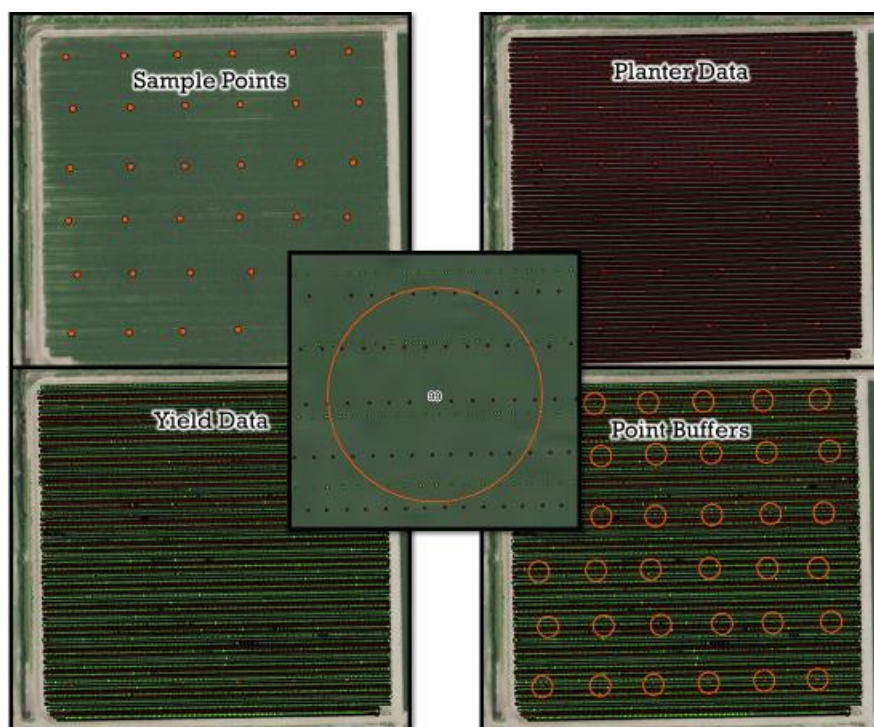


Figure 1 – Graphical display of methodology used to extract and average planter and yield data to fixed 1-acre grid sample points for data analysis. Only points within the circular buffers were included in the analysis dataset.

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Table 2. Data variables used in yield factor analysis.

Code	Code	Description	Code	Description
B_06	B_612	Boron	N_5_18	Nitrogen - May 18
Ca_06	Ca_612	Calcium	S_5_18	Sulfur - May 18
Cu_06	Cu_612	Copper	P_5_18	Phosphorous - May 18
Fe_06	Fe_612	Iron	K_5_18	Potassium - May 18
K_06	K_612	Potassium	Mg_5_18	Magnesium - May 18
Mg_06	Mg_612	Magnesium	Ca_5_18	Calcium - May 18
Mn_06	Mn_612	Manganese	Na_5_18	Sodium - May 18
Na_06	Na_612	Sodium	B_5_18	Boron - May 18
P_06	P_612	Phosphorous	Zn_5_18	Zinc - May 18
S_06	S_612	Sulfur	Mn_5_18	Manganese - May 18
Zn_06	Zn_612	Zinc	Fe_5_18	Iron - May 18
BS_Ca_06	BS_Ca_612	Base Saturation Calcium	Cu_5_18	Copper - May 18
BS_H_06	BS_H_612	Base Saturation Hydrogen	Al_5_18	Aluminum - May 18
BS_K_06	BS_K_612	Base Saturation Potassium	Tissue samples collected for five consecutive weeks. Code for subsequent samples follows the same pattern. E.g. N_6_1 = Nitrogen June 1	
BS_Mg_06	BS_Mg_612	Base Saturation Magnesium		
BS_Na_06	BS_Na_612	Base Saturation Sodium		
BufferPH_0	BufferPH_6	Buffer pH		
PH_06	PH_612	Soil pH		
HMEQ_06	HMEQ_612	Hydrogen		
CEC_06	CEC_612	Cation Exchange Capacity		
OM_06	OM_612	Organic Matter		
Ca_06_MSU	Ca_612_MSU	Calcium*		
K_06_MSU	K_612_MSU	Potassium*		
Mg_06_MSU	Mg_612_MSU	Magnesium*		
Na_06_MSU	Na_612_MSU	Sodium*		
P_06_MSU	P_612_MSU	Phosphorous*		
Zn_06_MSU	Zn_612_MSU	Zinc*		
PH_06_MSU	PH_612_MSU	Soil pH*		
CEC_06_MSU	CEC_612_MSU	Cation Exchange Capacity*		
"06" notation = 0" to 6" sampling depth				
"612" notation = 6" to 12" sampling depth				
* denotes analysis at MSU soils lab				
Precision Planting		Smart Firmer Sensor Readings		
Singulation		Organic Matter		
Skips & Doubles		Furrow Moisture		
Spacing & Speed		Furrow Uniformity		
Ride & Ground Contact		Clean Furrow		
DownForce & DownForce Margin		Soil Temp		

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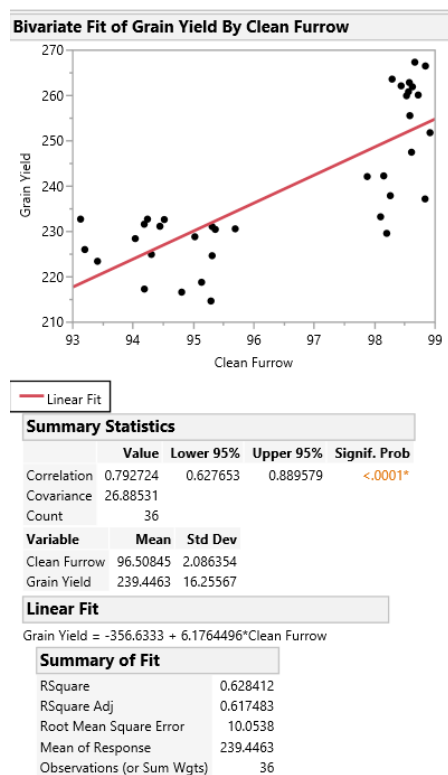


Figure 2. Yield by % Clean Furrow on Commerce 2 site across CCMT & FBM treatments.

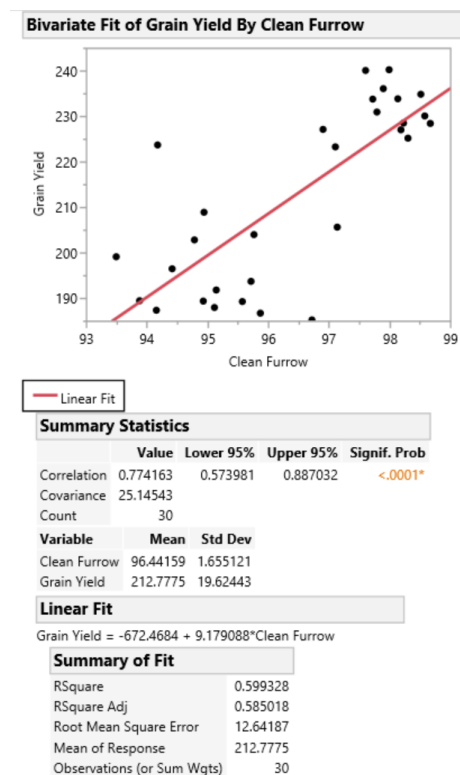


Figure 3. Yield by % Clean Furrow on Forestdale 1 site across CCMT & FBM treatments.

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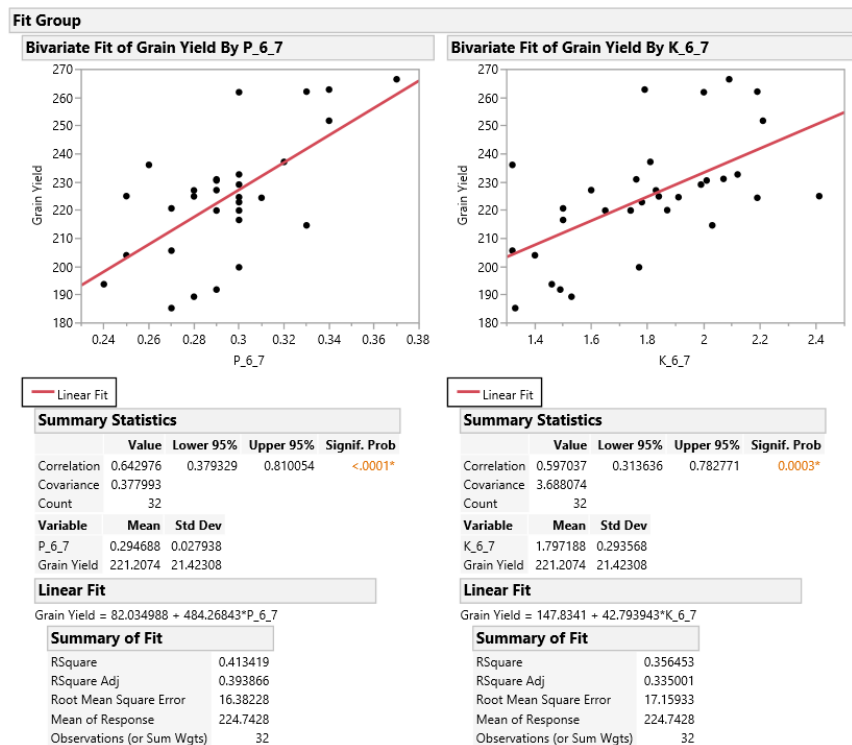


Figure 4. Corn yield and plant tissue P & K across all sites and treatments.

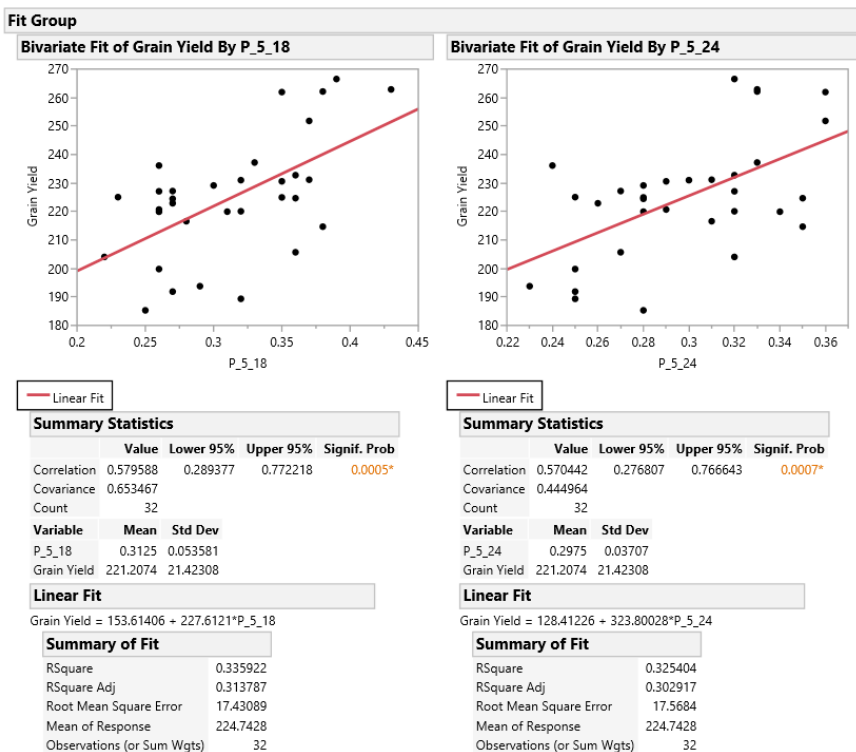


Figure 5. Corn yield and plant tissue P across all sites and treatments.

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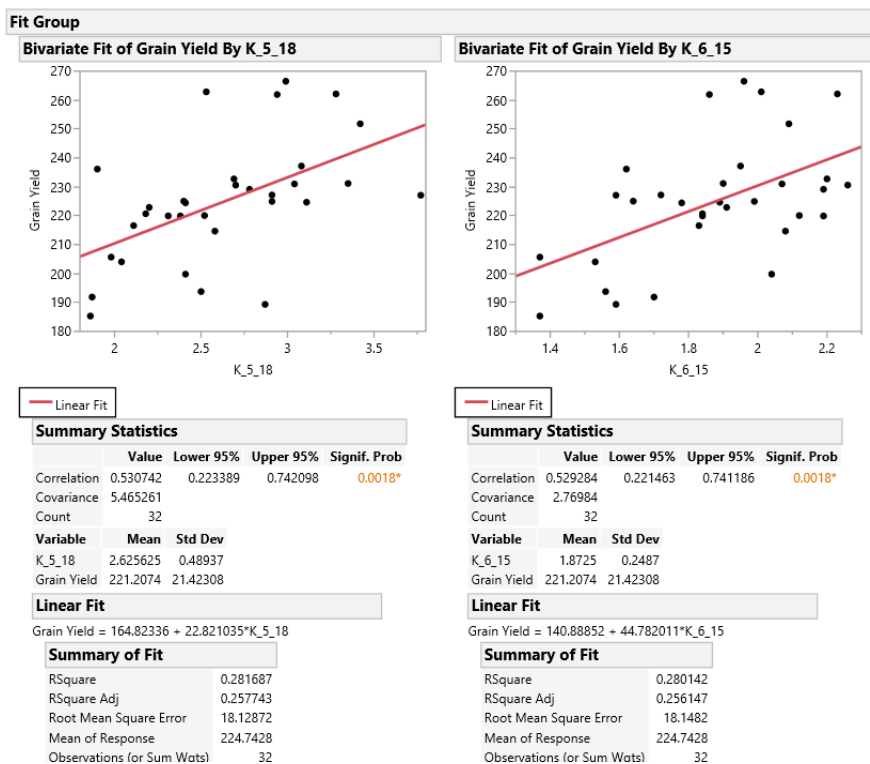


Figure 6. Corn yield and plant tissue K across all sites and treatments.

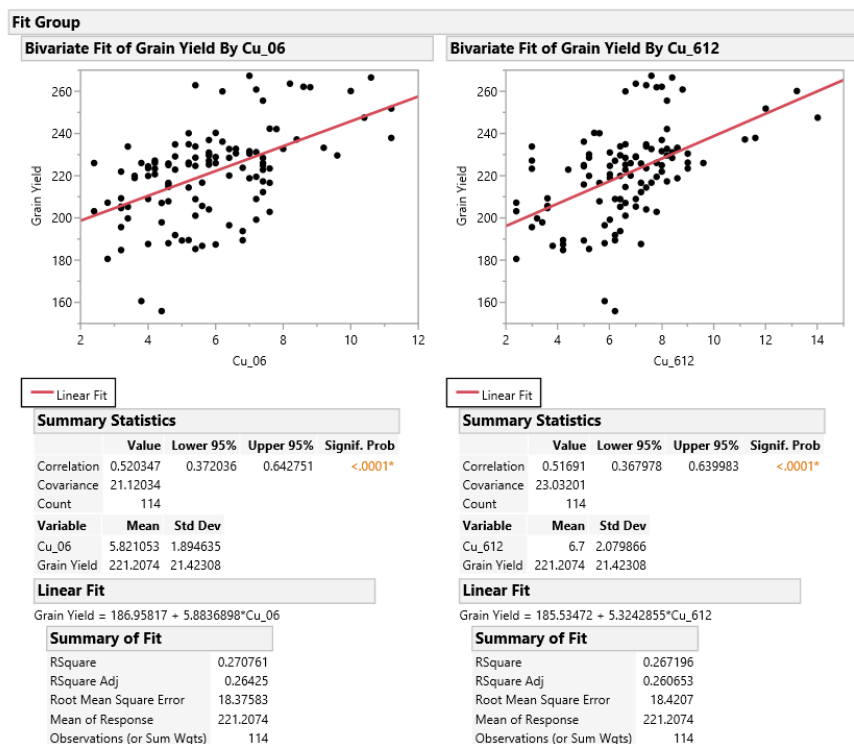


Figure 7. Corn yield and soil test copper across all sites and treatments.

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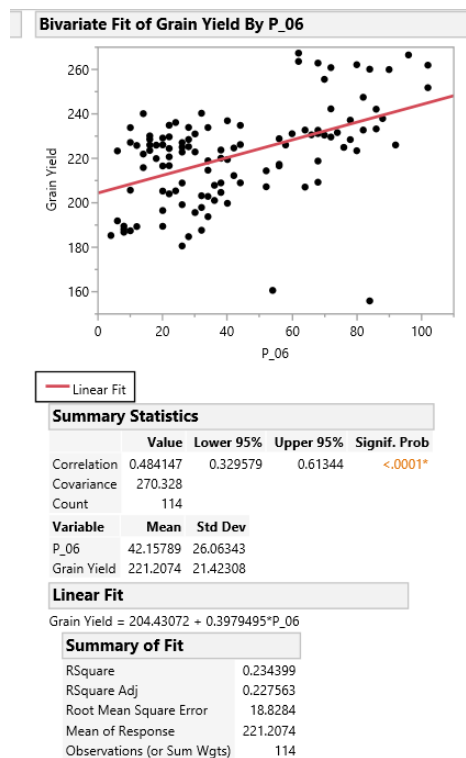


Figure 8. Corn yield and soil test P at 0-6 inches across all sites and treatments.

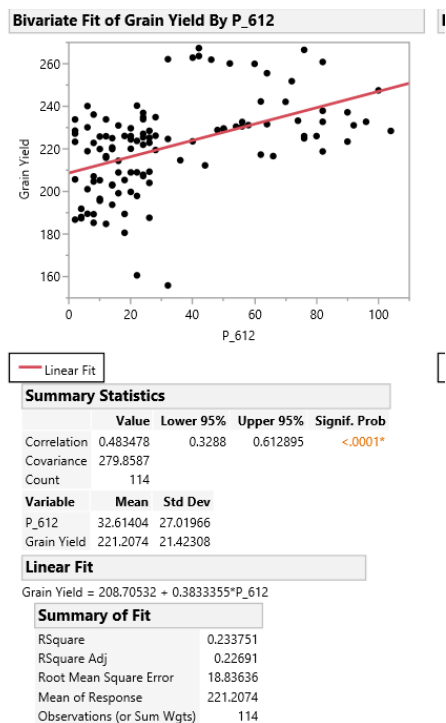


Figure 9. Corn yield and soil test P at 6-12 inches across all sites and treatments.

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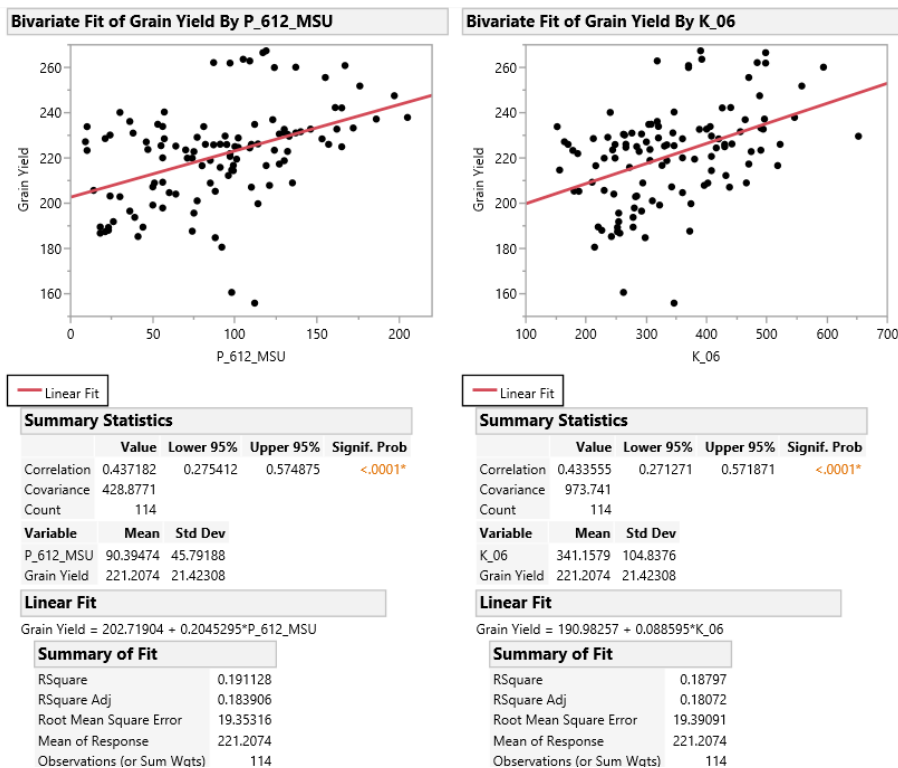


Figure 10. Corn yield and soil test P & K across all sites and treatments.

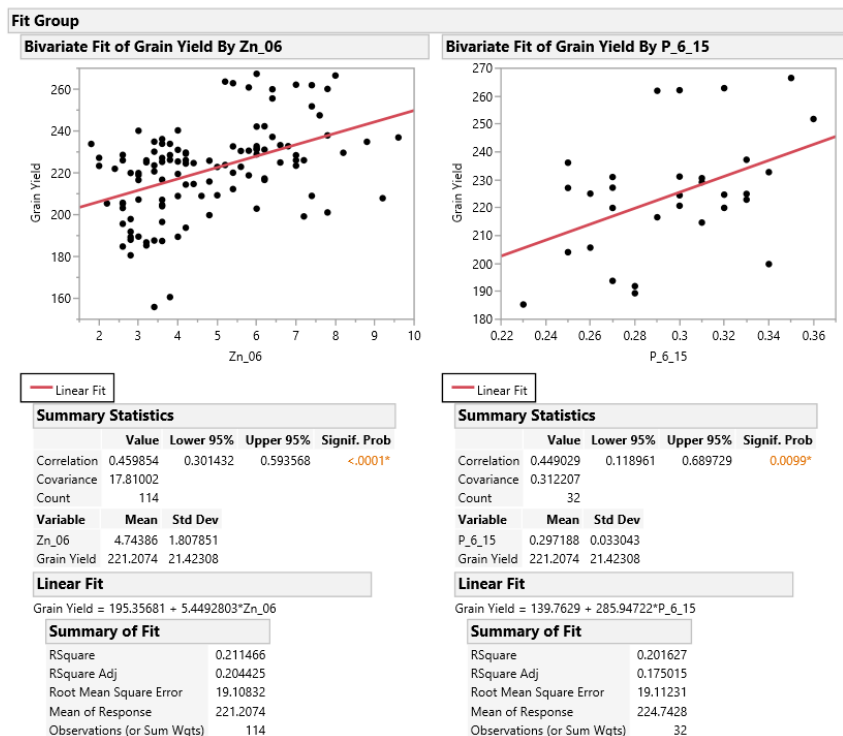


Figure 11. Corn yield and soil test Zn & plant tissue P across all sites and treatments.

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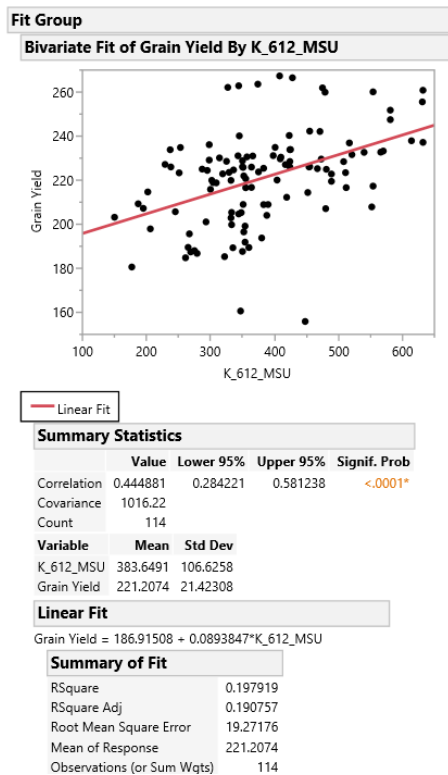


Figure 12. Corn yield and soil test K across all sites and treatments.

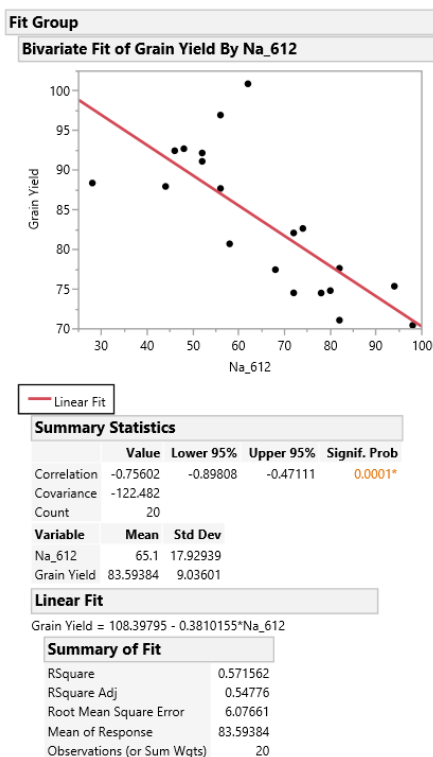


Figure 13. Soybean yield and soil test Na on Dundee 2 site across CCMT & FBM treatments.

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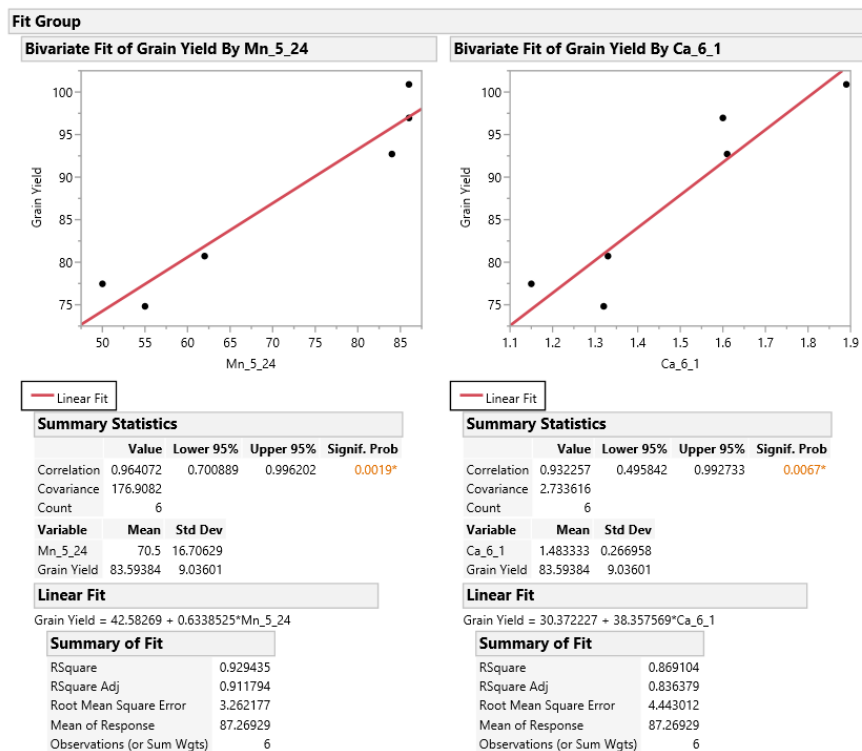


Figure 14. Soybean yield and plant tissue Mn & Ca on Dundee 2 site across CCMT & FBM treatments.

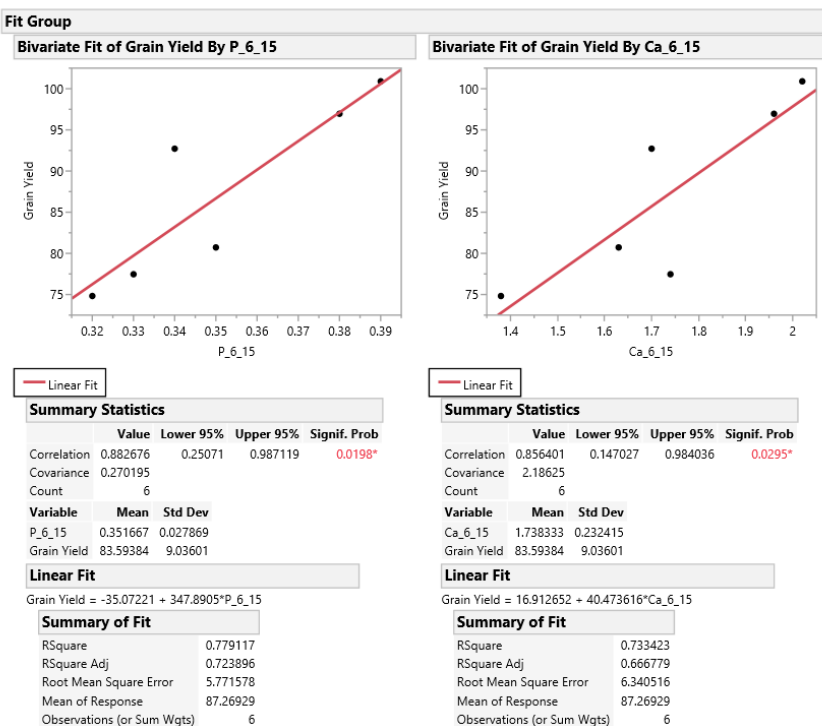


Figure 15. Soybean yield and plant tissue P & Ca on Dundee 2 site across CCMT & FBM treatments.

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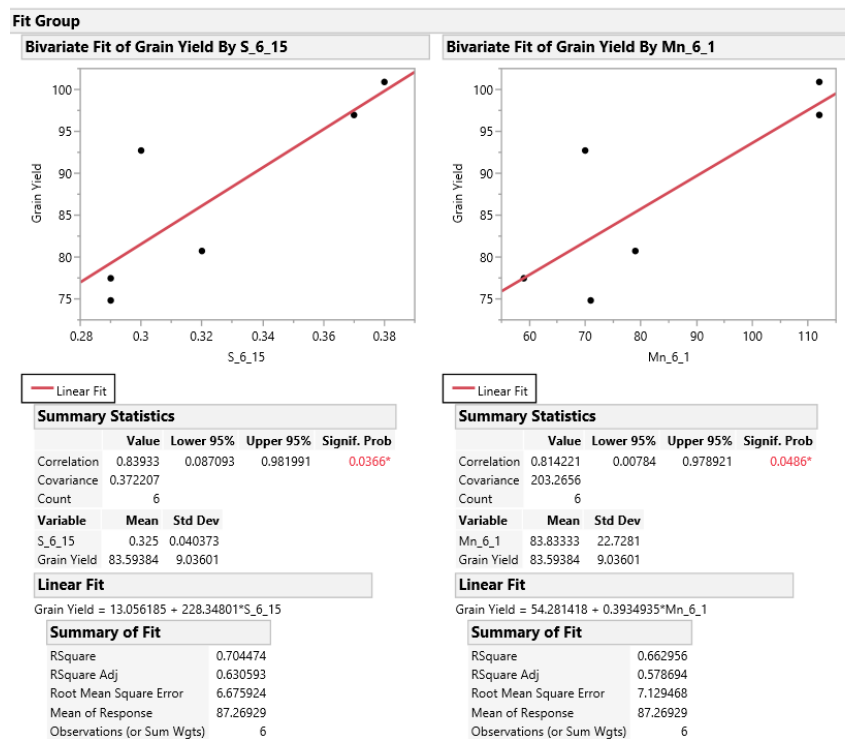


Figure 16. Soybean yield and plant tissue S & Mn on Dundee 2 site across CCMT & FBM treatments.

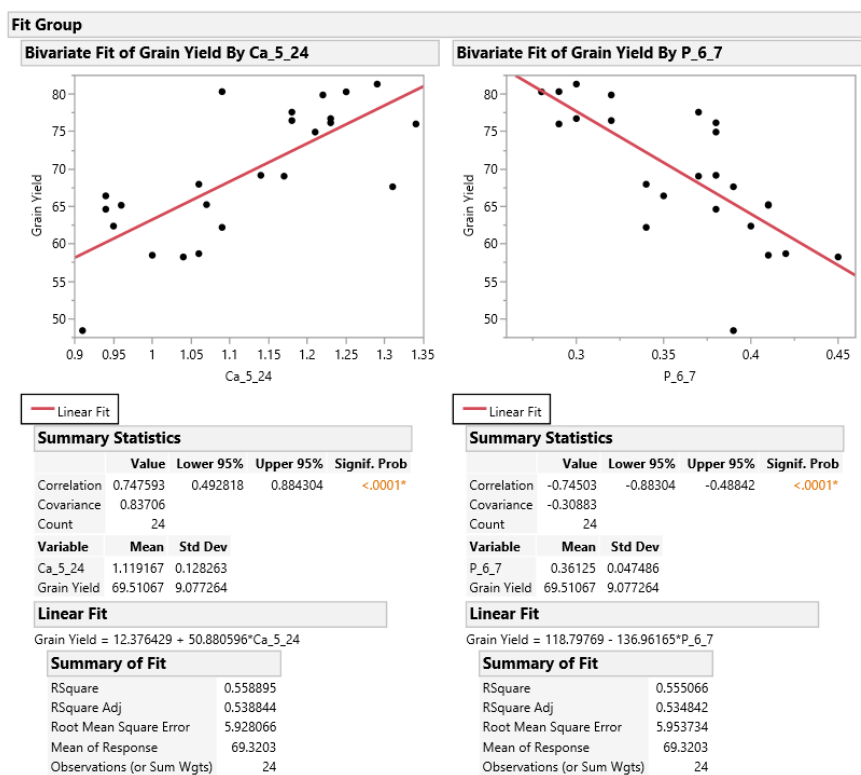


Figure 17. Soybean yield and plant tissue Ca & P on Forestdale 2 site across CCMT & FBM treatments.

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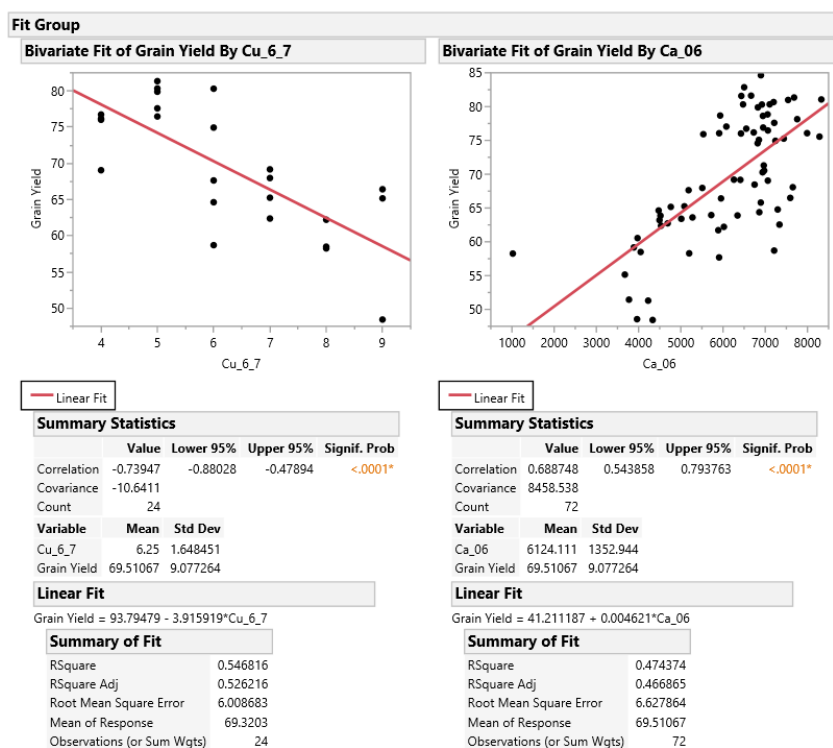


Figure 18. Soybean yield and plant tissue Cu & soil test Ca on Forestdale 2 site across CCMT & FBM treatments.

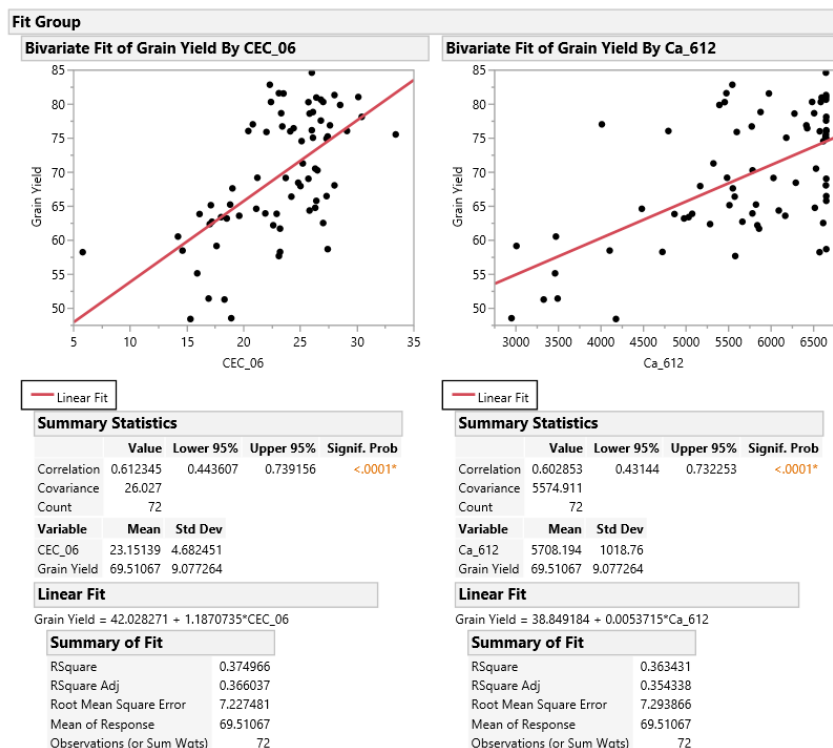


Figure 19. Soybean yield and soil test CEC & Ca on Forestdale 2 site across CCMT & FBM treatments.

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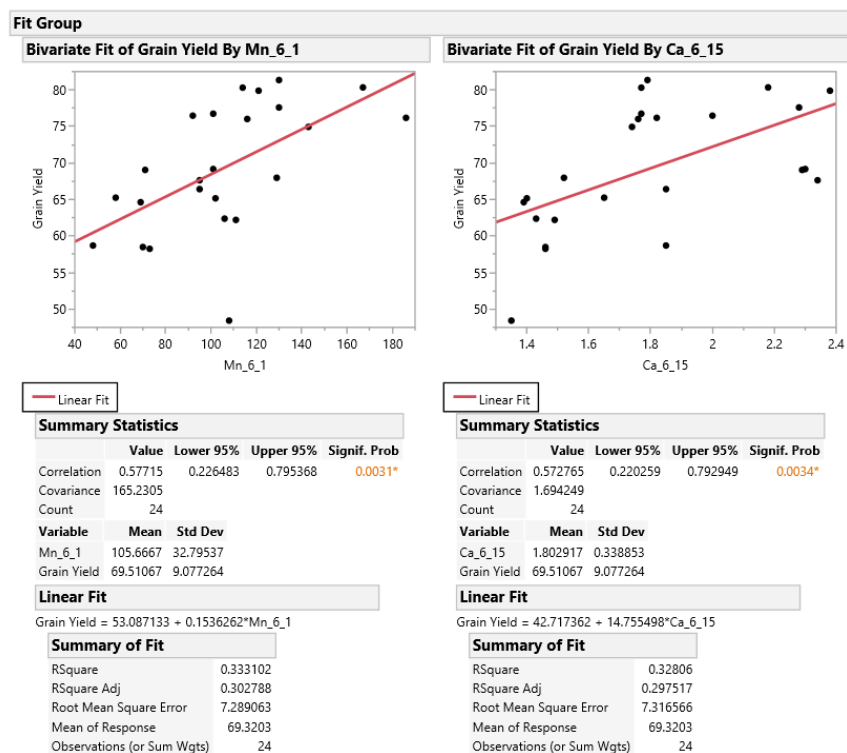


Figure 20. Soybean yield and plant tissue Mn & Ca on Forestdale 2 site across CCMT & FBM treatments.