

Extension Notes

Personal Column for April 20, 2010

By Gary Hall, Iowa State University Regional Extension Education Director

Ladies and Gentlemen, Check Your Planters!

Our region has the narrowest planting window of the state. It will be important to plant your corn between now and May 2. But don't get in such a hurry that you don't check those planters even if they were perfect a few fields ago.

You have probably heard from me and many others that you need to plant corn to a depth of about 2 inches. Mark Hanna, extension agricultural engineer and Roger Elmore, extension corn specialist tell us that Iowa State University research shows that corn emerges and produces well from both much deeper and shallower planting depths - provided ideal conditions occur following planting. Unfortunately we can't count on ideal conditions! So stick with 2 inches.

Checking your planter will be important to maintain that 2 inch planting depth. According to Dr. Hanna you should remember that the planter row unit must carry enough weight so that the depth-gauge wheels are firmly on the soil surface. Otherwise the double-disc seed opener is holding the row-unit out of the ground and seed will be planted too shallow.

Virtually all planters feature adjustable down pressure by using a spring on the closing system. Drs. Hanna and Elmore point out that increasing down spring pressure can increase soil strength and help bring capillary water to the seed if soil is dry.

Depth-gauge wheels on either side of the double-disc seed opener need to have enough contact pressure in order to be firmly on the soil surface (to gauge seed depth), but not so much contact pressure that the depth wheels overly compact soil adjacent to the seed zone. In practical terms, this means that when soil moisture is overly moist or wet, use only enough down spring pressure on parallel links attaching the row unit to the toolbar frame to maintain firm contact of the wheels on the soil surface.

Whatever happens during planting time will stay with you all season long. Plan to make sure your planting operation is going smoothly by checking your planter regularly. Then you can enjoy looking at your neighbor's fields to see if they were doing a good job of planting too.

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