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Maximizing Corn and Soybean Returns

Yes, I said maximize corn and soybean returns! So often I hear farmers say they want maximum yields. Truth-be-told that maximum yields come at a price that does not always give optimal return on investment. Protecting corn and soybean yields are important to getting a maximum return on investment.

For example, planting 140,000 soybean seeds per acre may yield slightly less compared to a seeding rate of 175,000, but does the extra cost of 35,000 seeds offset yield loss? Another example, maximum corn following soybean yields can be achieved with 150 pounds of nitrogen while optimum yields may be attained with 135 pounds, but are the extra bushels worth the extra \$0.60 per pound for nitrogen? Mark, do you mean \$0.60 per pound TIMES 15 pounds (from 150 to 135) = \$9.00?

There is tremendous value in conducting on-farm trials. There are new products, new genetics, new technologies, and new practices talked about or available each year. How do these **NEW** things perform on **YOUR** farm, under **YOUR** management?

All farmers manage farms differently. How products, technologies, and practices perform under each individual management, on each individual farm makes a tremendous amount of difference. Even under the same management, different farms perform differently due to soil characteristics and topography.

Last fall I read an article written by Fred Below from the Department of Crop Sciences at the University of Illinois titled, "Seven Wonders – A Ranking of the Top Seven Factors that Determine Corn Yields." In this article, Fred mentions that

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Newsletter Web Link Reminder

If you are viewing this newsletter electronically the blue text indicates a URL link to further resources. For those that are viewing a printed copy, you can simply do a GOOGLE search using the blue text and you should be able to find the additional materials. If all else fails, call myself or your county extension office for some extra assistance.

Don't Forget About the ICM Newsletter

The [ICM Newsletter](#) is starting to get new articles of interest and importance for the 2009 growing season. Subscribe on-line to get weekly or daily updates of new article postings.

NW Iowa No-Till/Strip-Till Conference

This year's conference features Palle Pedersen and No-Till Soybean Production. There will also be no-till farmers giving insights into making no-till/strip-till decisions. There are two sites to choose from, both at no charge. For more information call Plymouth County Extension, 712-546-7835.

Moville Site; March 16, Moville
Community Center, 815 Main St.,
9:00am to noon.

Boyden Site; March 16, Boyden Demco
Community Center, 714 Main St.,
1:00pm to 4:00pm.

DNR "Manure Applications to Frozen Ground" Public Hearing

You can make comments and voice your concerns. Don't miss this opportunity. Where: Dedham American Legion Hall
When: March 18, 6:00pm

New Farm Program Information

The hot topic right now is the new Farm Program. I've been getting questions about this and have to remind people I'm an agronomist and not a politician or farm management specialist. Having said that,

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there are important factors that he does not consider “wonders” because they are one-time improvements, they protect rather increase yields, or involve non-yearly decisions. Those seven wonders and attributed yield impacts are:

- 1) weather, 70-plus bu/ac;
- 2) nitrogen fertilization, 70 bu/ac;
- 3) hybrid selection, ~50 bu/ac;
- 4) previous crop, 20 bu/ac;
- 5) plant population, 20 bu/ac;
- 6) tillage, 15 bu/ac and
- 7) chemicals, 10 bu/ac.

This list does a good job of illustrating where emphasis needs to be placed, where time, dollars, and other resources might be more effective. Of the seven wonders, six can be altered to some extent by individual farm management decisions that are made. The only true factor that you cannot influence is weather. Weather can influence, either directly or indirectly, nearly all other crop production factors.

Your yield goals are 100% attainable before decisions and field work start for the growing season. **You retain 100% yield potential until the seed goes into the ground.** This 100% yield potential does not necessarily mean 100% yield goal because seed selection, fertilization, tillage, and other management decisions may have already reduced the yield goal. After planting, only you and nature can impact yield potential. Your job and #1 goal is to protect that yield potential with economically-based management.

In the past, fertilizer was cheap and there was no question of being able to afford applications, oftentimes soil test levels were being built up to a high or very high level. Now with more expensive commercial fertilizer and a potentially tight year ahead, the question is “how low can I go?” Using a banking analogy might best address this question; **with deposits and interest, withdrawals can safely be taken.** The key is determining realistic yield goals, calculating crop nutrient removal, and then using an adjusted removal rate as the application rate. Adjust the application rate based on soil test levels. For fields or areas that have high or very high soil test levels, reduce the application rate and use some of the “banked” nutrients. For fields or areas with low or very low soil test levels, increase the application rate to build soil test levels to the optimal level.

Is farming a business or a hobby? In business, the decision making process is extremely critical. Successful businesses are always looking for profit efficiency. Profit efficiency is making sure every dollar spent is making greater profit. The last dollar spent is not the most efficient dollar spent. In farming this means we need to continually evaluate nitrogen rates, seeding rates, insect thresholds, and chemical effectiveness. Times have changed, prices have changed, and so have the products we use.

Be an INNOVATOR! Try new things, experiment on your farm. Every year new genetics, new products, new practices, and new technologies are being touted. Some are good, some are bad and many need you to test them. How do they respond on your farm, under your management? On-farm trials help YOU make better decisions for YOUR farm.

Remember that maximum yield does not equal maximum profit.

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ISU has some resources available online that might be of some help. There is an Ag Decision Maker page titled “[2008 Farm Bill Information](#),” which has articles on the new program, some worksheets to help figure out details, and links to a Farm Bill webcast.