

Around Dakota Ag

Their advice to other renters

TERRY Nagel describes their rented land as “units,” rather than “acres.” “Look at the unit as a whole,” Terry advises other renters. “You rent one unit and you might have two quarters that are the best ever, and then you have that one quarter that is sandy and wants to blow. You can’t tell the landowner, ‘I’ll just take those two quarters.’ It doesn’t work that way.”

And keep an open relationship with the landowners, he advises. Terry sends a Christmas card to each landowner with a note about how the crop year went.

“Talk to them whenever you get a chance, no matter what you’re doing. I always make that extra step to go talk to them, even if it’s two words. I always try to make the extra effort,” he says. “You want to let them know how the land is doing.”

Some landowners text him regularly, sharing information about the weather in their area or asking how planting or harvesting is progressing.

The Nagels hope to someday purchase farmland, but only when the opportunity is right.

Yet, Terry understands the reluctance by others to sell their land. “If that was my grandpa’s land, I wouldn’t want to sell it either. They’re retired and they have kids, and they want to will their land to their kids.”

Terry holds one- to five-year contracts with landowners, with about two-thirds on paper and the rest as verbal agreements. Negotiating the cash rent is the main stickler, he says, because he must remain profitable. He pays competitive rental rates and negotiates other details.

“Some landowners are good if you want to rip out a fence; they’re game for it. Then there are some landowners that don’t even want you to touch a rock pile. So, restrictions, yes,” he says. “They want to make sure their land looks good, because I’m sure it makes them feel good.”

Some contracts also address hunting rights, fencing, roadside ditches, noxious weeds and straw residue remaining on the fields.

Terry owns 25 acres of land in the hamlet of Heil, where he stores some of his equipment. He also rents storage and grain bins from three landowners who rent him land.

With land at both ends of the county, Terry moves equipment whenever necessary, never shirking from the hour it might take to move from one field to the next. “We fold up and go,” his wife, Misty, says.

“There are challenges, because we get to a piece that is wet, so we fold and go to another field an hour away,” Terry says. “Moving doesn’t bother me; to keep going is the thing.”

Wet years not only create more movement, but also hamper planting. He left 460 acres unplanted this year, but still must pay rent on those acres.

“It’s not the whole unit that’s a failure,” he says. “I’m not expecting the landlords to have pity on me. It’s not their fault. You can’t do anything about it. You have to roll with the punches, I guess.” — *Luann Dart*



TOP-YIELD PANEL: Frank Kralicek Jr., with the microphone, appeared on a panel at the Soy100 Conference with Scott McKee (left) and Morgan Holler (right). Gregg Carlson, SDSU agronomy professor (standing), was the moderator.

High-yield secrets revealed

By **LON TONNESON**

WHAT’S the secret to growing 100-bushel soybeans and 300-bushel corn in the Dakotas?

High plant populations, lots of manure and fertilizer, and “no boat” — those are among the top answers to that question gleaned from the 2015 Soy100 and Great Plains Precision Ag conferences held in Brookings and Sioux Falls, S.D., in March.

At those events, Scott McKee, Alcester, S.D., talked about what he did to produce 103 bushels of soybeans per acre to win the 2014 South Dakota Soybean Yield Contest.

Frank Kralicek Jr., Yankton, S.D., answered questions about how he produced 318-bushel corn last year in the South Dakota Corn Show Plot.

Both yields were independently verified.

The record-setting yields came from fields where lots of hog or cattle manure had been applied in the past.

Needing high levels of fertilizer to grow 318 bushels per acre of corn is no surprise. But soybeans are another story.

We used to think that soybeans could fix all the nitrogen they needed themselves, said Cheryl Reese, South Dakota State University research agronomist. But this only works for soybeans that yield 40 to 50 bushels per acre. Additional bushels have to come from soil mineralization or applied fertilizer, she said.

The tricky part is that you can’t apply all extra N for soybeans before planting because then the soybeans won’t produce the nodules they need to fix N themselves.

Key Points

- Farmers share their tips at two conferences held in March.
- The keys are lots of manure and fertilizer, and high plant populations.
- It takes many hours of scouting and spraying to produce extra bushels.

Also, there’s a problem with losing N if it rains a lot.

Both Kralicek and McKee said they soil-test regularly so they know how much fertilizer they need to apply each year. Kralicek takes a half dozen tissue tests in his corn and soybeans during the growing season. Lots of times, the soil test will indicate that there are enough nutrients in the soil, but plants aren’t taking it up. He foliar-applies or sidedresses fertilizer to correct deficiencies.

Another key was high plant populations.

McKee double-planted the field where he pulled a 103-bushel-per-acre yield for the soybean contest. He ended up with a stand of about 225,000 plants per acre in 15-inch rows.

Kralicek said he’ll plant 36,000 to 40,000 seeds per acre for corn.

Both men said using preemergent herbicides are important to achieving high yields. In their experience, postemergent herbicides alone don’t give them absolutely clean fields early in the growing season.

They scout fields themselves constantly all summer long. McKee said he carries a magnifying glass with him

during the growing season. Kralicek said he is in his fields every week or so. When spraying, he’ll stop the tractor and just walk around the field. Trips to relatives for Sunday dinner turn into field scouting trips.

Some other interesting things about how these farmers approach growing corn and soybeans:

■ Kralicek doesn’t plant the same soybean variety on any more than 5% to 10% of acres. For corn, he doesn’t go over 20% of his acres to one hybrid, no matter how good it was the previous year.

■ Good soil drainage is a must. Kralicek said he’s seen some marked improvements in yields where he has tiled.

They’ve found that variable-rate seeding is different for soybeans than for corn. With corn, these farmers increase plant populations on their better ground and cut back on their tougher ground. They do the opposite for soybeans — a higher seeding rate may work better on their poorer soils. McKee said it seems more closely spaced soybeans push through crusts and other tough soil conditions better than widely spaced beans.

It takes a lot of work and time to produce 100-plus bushels of soybeans and 300-plus bushels of corn per acre. Kralicek — who lives near the Lewis and Clark Recreation Area, a popular fishing and vacation spot on the Missouri River — does his own testing and tissue sampling, and sprays as many as three to six times a season. Upon hearing that, one person in the Soy100 audience asked, “So you must not own a boat?”

“No,” Kralicek said, “I don’t have a boat.”