

Crops

Hoe drill boosts yields

By LON TONNESON

GENERALLY, the narrower the row, the better when it comes to soybeans in North Dakota.

But is there a difference when the field is no-tilled and the 7½-inch rows are planted with a disk opener, which disturbs very little soil, while the 20-inch rows are planted with a hoe opener, which really turns the row black?

Tom Trautman, Jamestown, N.D., says he saw a difference in a field that he planted both ways last year.

Soybeans seeded with a hoe drill in 20-inch spacing came up two days ear-

Key Points

- Row spacing makes a difference in farmer's no-till soybeans.
- He planted with disk and hoe openers in 7½- and 20-inch spacing.
- Hoe drill and 20-inch spacing held an edge all season.

lier and stayed ahead of the soybeans seeded with the disk drill in 7½-inch spacing. The advantage held for the 20-inch beans throughout the whole year, and they produced 2 to 3 bushels per acre more than beans in the 7½-inch rows.



HOE ADVANTAGES: In a no-till field near Jamestown, N.D., soybeans planted in 20-inch rows with a hoe opener show an advantage over soybeans planted in 7½-inch rows with a disk drill.

One year isn't enough to prove that hoe-drilled planted beans outyielded disk-drilled beans. "Maybe it was just the kind of year we had," Trautman says.

But it's something that he'll continue to experiment with.

Trautman was comparing the hoe drill and the disk drill because he planned to grow more corn. He feared if he tried to plant beans in corn stubble with a hoe drill, the cornstalk stubble would plug up in the hoe opener shanks.

"That didn't happen. The stalks slid right around them," he says.

Best buy

Trautman, who spoke at a no-till tour last year, says that hiring a crop consultant is one of the best investments he makes every year.

"I have an agronomy degree, so I should know this stuff," he says, "but I went to school 25 years ago, and we have a lot more products and problems that weren't around then."

The crop mix has changed, too. When he went to school, wheat was king, and sunflower was the hot new crop.

Now, Trautman plants more corn and soybeans than anything else.

Another advantage is that the Centrol crop consultant who Trautman hires is part of a company with other agronomists. "It's like having a whole network



TOM TRAUTMAN

of consultants working for you," he says.

Out of sunflowers

Trautman is planting more corn and soybeans because they have been more profitable and less risky than wheat and sunflowers. Scab has made wheat quality less predictable for him. Pests have made it difficult to count on sunflowers. His problem has been deer, which nip the buds of plants when the plants are about a foot tall. He suffered a 50% loss on one field recently.

White mold is a problem in sunflowers, too. It produces small, hard fungi bodies called sclerotia that get mixed in with the kernels at harvest. Confection sunflower buyers often reject loads with even low levels of sclerotia because it is difficult to separate from the kernels during processing.

"I love eating confection sunflower seed," Trautman says. "But I can't eat them all."

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