

Crops

Sunflower looks for more acres

By LON TONNESON

THE race is on for acres in 2008, and the sunflower industry is trying to figure out how to attract more production.

"We need 500,000 more acres to meet demand," says Larry Kleingartner, National Sunflower Association executive director. Farmers, marketers and processors met in Medora, N.D., at the NSA's summer conference to devise a

strategy to attract acres next year.

Demand is rising for healthy oils from sunflower, but with high prices for nearly every other crop, attracting additional acres may be difficult.

Competitive price is key

A price that is competitive with other crops will be key to attracting more acres.

So will be crop insurance and revenue protection.

Because sunflowers aren't traded on

the futures market, it is difficult to offer pricing options similar to corn, soybeans and wheat, says John McLean, a Cargill merchandiser.

"We are looking to see what we can do," he says.

Less hassle, more biotech

Processors and elevator operators say the industry needs to reduce the "hassle factor" associated with growing sunflowers. Long hauls for delivery, unpredictable discount schedules and

losses to blackbirds are among the top problems.

Some research breakthroughs would increase acreage, too. A Roundup Ready hybrid would make weed control in sunflowers as convenient as it has become in soybeans. Disease-resistant hybrids could ease worries about losses to white mold and downy mildew. Effective methods to control blackbirds would make it possible to grow sunflowers on land that isn't extremely isolated from blackbird habitat.



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