

CROPS

Precision's perks in action

By WILLIE VOGT

It can be difficult for a producer to quantify the value of new technology without experience on the farm. Consider something as simple as precision-guided manual steering with a lightbar. The technology, considered simple by many, can be a first-step move to enhanced productivity. Just ask Randy Gingle and his son, Shaun.

The Gingles took part in the Precision Start program this year with Farm Progress and John Deere. As participants, they worked with the new John Deere Lightbar teamed with the StarFire 300 GPS receiver for spring fieldwork.

"It made it easier to steer," says

Randy. "Sometimes on the second pass you can't see your mark, but with the lightbar that wasn't a problem." The Gingles used the system for some spring tillage and anhydrous applications.

They plan more fall work, too, using it to steer in passes with a ripper.

PRECISION
START

Not for every application

Shaun did find that in some tillage applications, using the lightbar was a problem. "You can't keep it on track when you're tilling at an angle," he notes. He smiles and adds true autosteering would overcome that issue — Randy's not ready to make that move yet.

Darryl Roeder, Ag Management Systems support tech for Gilsinger Implement, the Deere dealer supporting the project, notes some surprise over continued interest in lightbars in the market. "We sold all we ordered this spring," he adds. "I'm a little shocked at the interest in the system."

Autosteering demo

In the spring, Roeder arranged for the Gingles to try the John Deere AutoTrac Universal system to give them a taste of true autosteering. Shaun and his brother, Rance, who works off the farm, liked the autosteering. "You couldn't get Rance out of the tractor," Randy smiles. "He really liked that autosteering setup."

However, ask Randy what he thought of the autosteering setup and Shaun pipes up, "He wouldn't run it."

Randy smiles and admits he didn't try out the higher-tech system, perhaps in part because he still likes to drive the tractor when he's in the cab.

The Gingles aren't standing still;

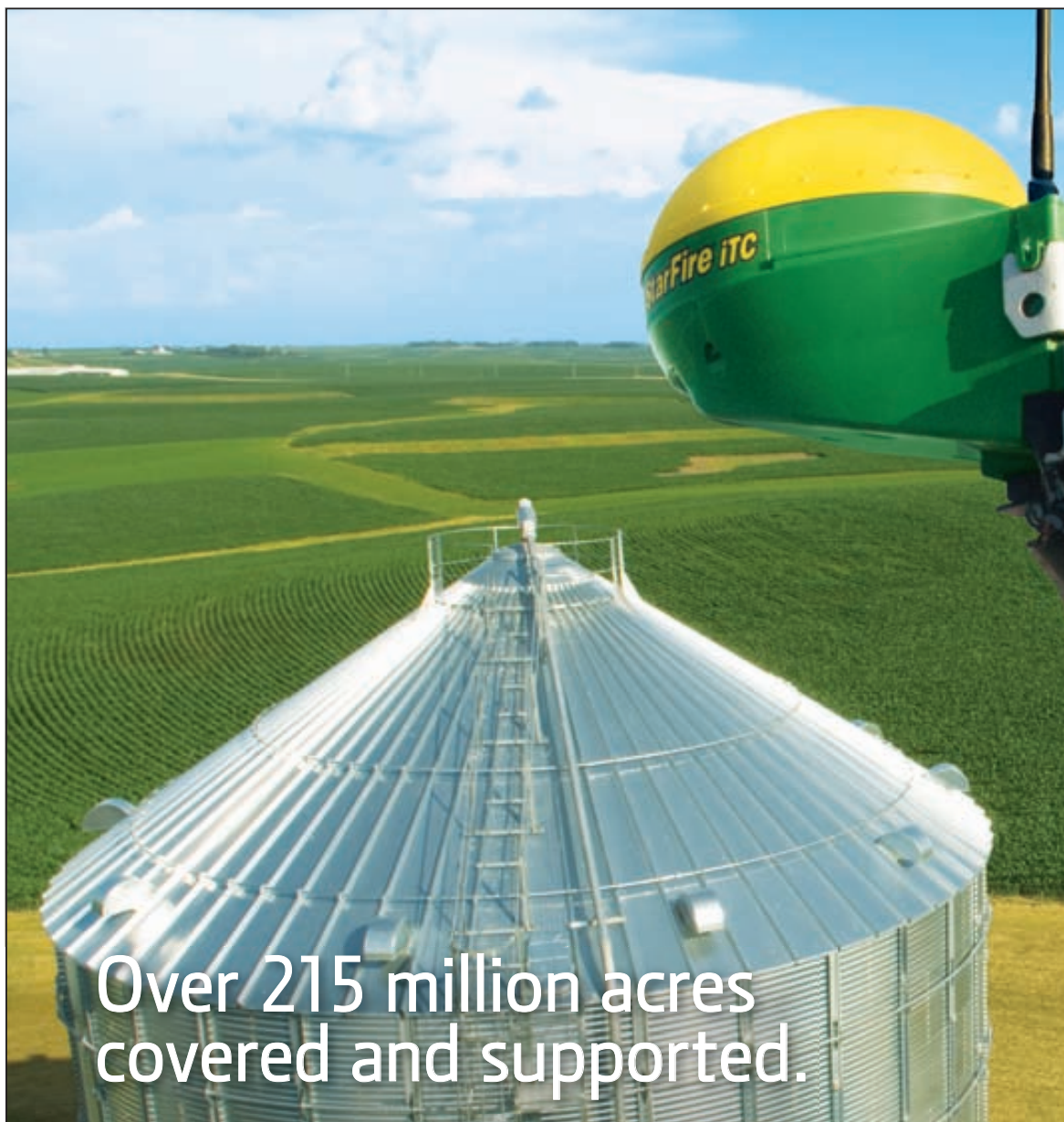
Key Points

- Using a lightbar for precision steering makes anhydrous application easier.
- Tillage is not always a good candidate for aided steering.
- Lightbar technology remains a popular option for many.

they invest in their operation, buying more grain storage to better manage risk (Shaun put in a new 16,000-bushel bin this year). As for precision steering? They'll keep using the lightbar, but the tractor they used for tillage in 2009 becomes the planting tractor in 2010. Who knows, it might get autosteering by then.



WARMING TO NEW TECH: Randy Gingle liked the way a lightbar helped make tillage passes easier, without the need to search out a mark to avoid overlap.



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READY FOR AUTO-STEERING: Shaun Gingle got a taste of true autosteering thanks to a demonstration last spring. Whether the farm will move up from a lightbar remains to be seen.

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