

## Ohio News Watch

## Yields depend on combine setup

## Key Points

- Capturing top yields puts pressure on combine setup.
- Variable crops will challenge combine operation skills.
- Build an effective checklist and work it through harvest.

By WILLIE VOGT

**P**URSUIT farmer Dale Launstein took a helicopter ride recently, along with Nick Griffieon, his agronomist. This was no joyride; it was aimed at spotting tough places in fields for Launstein Farms near Holland, Iowa.

"We're checking out those areas to find some of the worst in the field," Launstein says. "Then we're going to send someone out to cut stalks and bring them into the shop."

Pushing up corn yields remains a top priority, even if the 2012 drought pulled down yields on your operation. The harvest of 2012 is going to teach us plenty about crops, varieties, soil types, fertilizer use and more going forward. But first, you have to get all of this year's crop out of the field.

That's the point of Launstein's aerial excursion. Those poor stalks were brought into the farm shop, along with the combine corn head, in an effort to fine-tune stripper plate settings to get all the grain off every stalk of corn left standing after a tough year.

"We can run presets in our combine for different conditions and make changes as we move across fields," Launstein says. "If we come into an area where conditions have changed, we can alter airspeed, rotor distances, chaffer and sieve settings on the go. We want to get all the kernels off the cob."

That also means preharvest prep to make sure all those tools are ready when the combine rolls.

## Stalks prove challenging to next year's seedbed

**P**USHING up corn yields brings along a challenge more farmers have encountered, especially with a move toward more corn-on-corn acres: residue. Higher crop residues are a great tool for boosting soil organic matter on your fields, but managing those residues are important, too. A key, says Nick Griffieon, agronomist for Launstein Farms near Holland, Iowa, is crimping the cornstalk during harvest.

"The main issue is that you want to get a good crimp on that stalk so it will break down faster over the winter," he says.

More growers are looking at chopping heads to cut stalks as the combine moves through the field, and that will be an option. The main comment from growers who try chopping heads is concern about the power they need, but like all new tools, the key will be learning to manage the technology for best results.

Managing residue is important because a top-quality seedbed is critical for getting an even, better-producing stand the following year. While the 2012 drought reduced residue issues for this year in some areas, it's a management concern as farmers push their Pursuit of 300 going forward.



**VARIABLE CHALLENGE:** The weather of 2012 may be drought-focused, but crop variability across the Corn Belt has a number of causes. Capturing what bushels you did produce means top-level harvest management this season.

For anyone harvesting this year, a fresh look at the combine from front to back to make sure all parts of the machine are fine-tuned makes sense. Rechecking concave clearance, cylinder or rotor speed, and separator adjustments, as well as watching the corn head, all will be key.

**Challenges, opportunities**

Tackling a crop to get the most out of what nature has given you is always the harvest challenge. Setting that combine to tackle those smaller ears (with a tighter

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stripper plate setting) is important this year. Griffieon adds that this year's crop has weaker stalks, too, which may mean down corn in some fields that will take more time to combine.

Setting the machine right, and constantly adjusting it, will get more corn from field to bin. Launstein Farms wasn't as hard hit by the drought as other areas of the state, but Launstein expects to encounter plenty of variability. In this weather year, where a mild winter and near-perfect spring gave way to wild summer swings across the Corn Belt, attention to detail will be critical.

Bruce Peterson, who farms near Northfield, Minn., admits that in light of the 2012 drought, his crop looks good. Parts of eastern Minnesota received a fair share of rain, but Peterson still

expects variability in the crop.

"We're pretty blessed with rainfall, but we had storm damage in June with too much rain. We had hail damage," he notes, reading off a list of rainfall totals that include 16 inches in a five-day period.

Peterson can see that crops on lighter ground are suffering even after all that rain, and he expects that hailed-on corn will be variable, as well. In fact, that expectation may be a nearly Corn Belt-wide message for those pursuing top yield: The combine is your paycheck, and how it is set up can make a big difference.

Launstein is seeing that same variability, which has been magnified on some fields by drought.

"We're going to see some spots where corn will go 225 per acre, and in the same field, we'll run through areas where the yield is zero. That kind of gives you an idea what the variability will be like," he notes.

**Make a list and stick to it**

Griffieon says Launstein Farms is going through a checklist of activities for harvest. "We have our checklist, and we get ready and go for harvest. It's a system we go through every year, and it's not much different for this year."

Of course, last year's harvest took a very long time on that operation after 100-mph straight-

line winds knocked down the crop in July. "We had to pick going in one direction," Griffieon says. "This year, the crop is standing ... we're going to move pretty fast right through it."

The key is adapting to whatever the weather throws you, he says. There is a larger issue that returns year after year that more corn farmers will encounter, too — and that's high residues.

Best approach for a season like this? "The whole secret to combining is to climb out of the seat, get behind the combine, get underneath the stripper rolls, and check out what's going on. What are you leaving behind?" Launstein asks. "Then you calibrate and adjust. You can't be chained to the combine seat."

Studies show that losses as low as 2 to 3 bushels per acre are possible with timely harvest and top machine adjustment. And in a year like this, you'll want to get every bushel.

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