

PLANT PRECISELY: Have your planter ready to go long before you anticipate planting. Then drive at the right speed, and do the best job possible.



Set the table for higher yields in 2013

By DAVE NANDA

Commentary

REMEMBER the song “50 ways to leave your lover”? I would never leave my wife, Connie, because I love her so much. However, we can borrow from the song to look at the 2013 season. I call it “10 ways to love your cornfield.”

The 2012 season reminded us there are things we should focus on if we want to produce more corn. Here are my top 10 tips to tip-top yields.

1. Soil test. Make sure to test your soil this spring. You really don't know what nutrients are left in the ground. You may have to get every farm with different soil types tested. Water retention capacity of various soil types made a big difference in crop removal.

2. Be realistic. What is a realistic yield potential based on soil type and historical

data? Fertilize to match yield goals. Make adjustments based on soil tests. Some farmers still “pour it on” just because they don't want to be short.

3. Enhance soil fertility. Along with nitrogen, maintain proper levels of phosphorus, potassium, calcium, sulfur and magnesium. Also pay attention to micronutrients. Check for deficiency of seven essential nutrients: boron, chlorine, copper, iron, manganese, molybdenum and zinc. Each element plays a key role in essential physiological processes.

4. Balance soil pH. Corn likes pH values between 6.0 and 6.5. Try to maintain a pH balance between 5.8 and 6.8. That should work for most crops. If you're

going to vary input rates, start with lime.

5. Take credit for N. There may be some nitrogen left that your crop didn't use. Also take credit for N from the previous soybean crop.

6. Use starter fertilizer. This is especially important if you plant early, and in no-till or minimum-till situations. Give seedlings a healthy start. It's critical to good yields.

7. Split N applications. Apply most N when needed by plants. Recently, about 40 farmers in a meeting said, to the last man, that they sidedress N. This did my heart good!

8. Use crop rotations. You'll have fewer diseases and insects, plus higher yields, if corn follows soybeans.

9. Plant with accuracy and patience. Fine-tune your planter; have each row unit checked; prepare a good seedbed; use

seed firmers; and plant into moisture, but not too deep or too shallow. Don't plant too fast. If you can vary planting populations as you plant, go with higher seeding rates for corn on better ground and lower seeding rates in corn on lighter soils or soils with lower water retention capacity.

10. Plant cover crops. It's too late to plant them for 2013, but watch how your neighbors who planted cover crops get along this spring and summer. Cover crops improve soil tilth, boost organic matter content over time and are beneficial to water retention capacity. Make your ground healthier. Let earthworms and microbes do their dirty jobs.

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