



**FARMER INNOVATOR:** Gregg Sauder, Tremont, helps farmers create picket-fence stands with tools designed to improve seed spacing depth and overall accuracy.

# In search of planting perfection

By **CHERRY BRIESER STOUT**

**E**ACH winter, multitudes of Corn Belt farmers flock to the Precision Planting agribusiness complex near Tremont to learn how to get peak performance from their planters.

On one particular day this year, more than 250 farmers from 16 states were in attendance for one of a series of sold-out conferences that week. Farmers came to check out some of the latest precision planting tools, as well as to get a primer on basic planter adjustments that can add up to an extra 2,000 ears from every acre, or 12 to 16 bushels an acre.

## A family affair

Since Precision Planting's start in the mid-1990s, founder Gregg Sauder and wife Cindy have grown the business to 50 full-time employees. This operation is a family affair with all of the couple's seven children involved in some capacity.

It all starts with the planter, says Gregg, who advises farmers to pay attention to small things if a picket-fence stand is important to them.

Planters need to be in first-rate condition to handle today's planting challenges. More corn-on-corn acres and more residue place heavy demands on a planter, while the increasing cost of stacked seed and treatments means that poorly placed seeds waste genetic potential and money.

That's why a growing

## Key Points

- A picket-fence stand starts with the planter.
- Fast planting speeds can end up costing \$16 an acre.
- New 20/20 planter monitor is drawing strong interest.

number of farmers send their finger pickup, vacuum and air meters in to Precision Planting to be calibrated, based on the grower's specific information on seed size, weight and planting speed.

Gregg describes this all-too-

common planting scenario: You're planting at 7 mph because it looks like rain or you're late getting into the fields. Plant at that rate and you'll get what you ask for: an uneven stand with doubles and plant skips.

Faster planting speeds result in more skips and multiple seeds that could cost you up to \$16 an acre due to spacing problems. Some research suggests that for every 1 inch in variation from the targeted spacing, yields are reduced 2.6 bushels per acre.

The best speed to run is from 5 to 5.5 mph. Planters

and the curvature of the seed tubes are designed to run at that speed.

## Singulate each seed

Whether you have a finger pickup or vacuum planter, the goal is the same: to singulate each seed and place it in the ground. "You can quickly mess up the good job you've done with singulation in the seed tube," says Tim Sauder. "Anytime the seed bounces side to side, you're going to lose spacing."

The educational and visual demonstrations at the Precision

Planting conferences show how worn seed tubes interfere with seed drop, leading to improper seed placement.

Demonstrations of the new 20/20 SeedSense planting monitor system drew the biggest crowds at the winter conference. The system measures the amount of row bounce and down force and helps determine the proper amount of down pressure for specific soil conditions and types.

## New 20/20 planter monitor

"The 20/20 tool is an engineer's dream of knowing exactly what's going on in a planter," says Phil Baurer, one of the engineers of the system.

This will be the second year for the 20/20, with 60 beta units out last spring.

It comes with a GPS connector mounted on the roof of the planter. The brains of the 20/20 system are mounted on a planter hitch, and connect to the planter monitor, explains Baurer. All row-by-row information and seed singulation is recorded every second. Information can be exported to a flash drive and field-mapped.

"When you register the 20/20, we send you a USB memory stick so that you can set up planter configuration, hybrids, etc., on your PC," adds Baurer.

Precision Planting also produces and distributes proprietary meter components, the MeterMax meter calibration system, Keeton Seed firmers and eSet vacuum disks.



**PRODUCT EVOLUTION:** The developer of the new 20/20 planter monitoring system, Phil Baurer says it allows the operator to know exactly what's going on in the planter.