

# Dress the planter for success

By CHERRY BRIESER STOUT

**W**HEN Aaron Baer heads to the fields around Tremont in the next few weeks, his goal will be to make sure every pass is perfect. The challenges facing the planter are immense, notes Baer, who works at Precision Planting.

Today's planting issues — heavy residue and more corn on corn — require that planters be in excellent condition. Of all the factors that affect production and profitability, planter condition is the one variable that you have real control over, says Baer.

"We have five to six soil types across the field and change populations on the fly with GPS," he notes.

If your goal is to make those perfect passes that produce picket-fence stands with optimum yield potential, you need to be mindful of all that you're asking the planter to do in a minute's time.

Taking half a day to check out your planter and making small adjustments to achieve uniform seed drop and plant spacing is the first step, explains Baer. With planting season still a few weeks away, there's still time to make sure your planter is in top shape for the season ahead.

Here are Precision Planting's top 10 things to check on your planter to improve its performance:

## 1. Hitch height

This is a critical, but often overlooked step. The first thing to check is hitch height, says Baer. Take a level on the main frame of the planter and get it

## Key Points

- Uniform seed drop is the first step to picket-fence stands.
- Dress your planter for success from front to back.
- Take half a day to tune up your planter this spring.

level or tipped slightly uphill. You never want the unit tipped down because then the coulters run too deep and closing wheels run too shallow.

## 2. Parallel arms

Check parallel arms, bushings and bolts for signs of wear. Pick up the planter and wiggle the row unit to make sure it is level and the bushings are tight, advises Baer. If you have a wear spot on a parallel arm, turn it over or replace it.

Worn bushings increase row bounce and seed bounce. Check for signs of wear on down-pressure springs, which hold the units in ground. Proper down pressure is required for uniform seed depth. As a rule of thumb, you should be able to grab the gauge wheel with one hand and make it roll in the dirt. If you have too much down pressure, you're creating sidewall compaction. Too little down pressure and you're not planting seed deep enough.

In the field, you can test down pressure by taking a pocketknife and picking at the wall. It should crumble very easily. If the V crumbles too easily it's very dry or your down pressure isn't right.

## 3. Drive system

Start with fresh, oiled chains and check them daily. Inspect every transmission chain,

meter drive chain and insecticide box chain. A kinked chain will cause a vibration in the meter. Check out the alignment of the drive shaft, adds Baer. "If running starter fertilizer, you need to get it on its own drive shaft. It helps the meter run smoothly."

## 4. Seed meters

"The heart of the planter is the meter running the row unit," says Derek Sauder. All seed meters should be cleaned and inspected every year. It can add 6 or more bushels of corn per acre.

## 5. Double disk openers

Test double disk openers for proper functioning necessary for good seed-to-soil contact. Worn disks may no longer meet at the bottom, which can create a W instead of the desired V-shaped furrow, and lead to improper closing of the furrow. Disks need to be replaced if they are less than 14.5 inches in diameter. Adjust disks if they are not meeting properly at the bottom.

## 6. Seed tubes

Make sure seed tubes are in good shape, are clean and are free of obstructions. At about \$15 a tube, it's an inexpensive and good investment to replace any tubes with rough or worn edges, which can result in poorly placed seeds, despite perfectly functioning meters. Worn seed tubes flip out seed erratically in the trench.

## 7. Spikes

A good alternative to rubber closing wheels is to use one 15-inch spike wheel and one 13-inch rubber closing wheel to



**PERFECT PASS:** Aaron Baer gets lots of experience studying planter performance while managing a farm team that runs 36-row and 24-row planters.

control the depth and seal the soil up better. Run spikes in a forward position. For no-tillers, running two 13-inch spikes is a good option with a drag chain on the back to give the most aggressive action.

## 8. Closing wheels

Make sure closing wheels are centered on the seed furrow. To check closing wheels, get your planter out on a concrete floor. Pull it ahead about 5 feet and examine the mark left by the planter's double disk openers. The mark should be right down the centerline between the closing wheels. If a closing wheel is running too close to the mark, adjust it so that it's properly centered. If you're running a spike wheel, the po-

sition of the closing wheel is especially important.

## 9. Row cleaners

Make sure row cleaners are properly adjusted. With more corn on corn and higher residue levels, you need to make sure row cleaners are doing their job. On uneven ground, floating row cleaners will give a more uniform environment than fixed row cleaners.

## 10. Seed firmers

Consider Keeton seed firmers to improve germination. Studies show it can deliver a 6- to 7-bushel increase per acre. Seed firmers help ensure a clean "V" and get seed down into good contact in the ground, which helps draw moisture in.



**PLANTER PREP:** Wiggle the planter row units to make sure they are level and the bushings are tight.

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