


# Prairie

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# FARMER

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# Ahead of schedule

By HOLLY SPANGLER

### Key Points

- Seed sales have moved up, beginning before harvest.
- Farmer and dealer competition has driven early sales.
- Most companies expect and will accept seed order changes.

**T**HOUGH many of you won't yet have seen your elevator manager by the time this magazine arrives in your mailbox, there's a good chance you'll have seen your local seed dealer. And very likely, you'll have seen several vendors, as seed sales creep ever forward on the calendar.

Why? In a word, competition, say seed company reps. And it's on both ends of the deal.

Farmers and seed firms are both members of consolidating industries, represented by fewer and larger entities. Seed companies compete harder for the farmer's business, while farmers compete harder with each other to get the latest and greatest hybrids and varieties, a trend some seed dealers say started with the triple-stacked hybrids of a few years ago.

That competition drives sales earlier and earlier, and in fact, Beck's Hybrids expects to have 100% of last year's sales plus a little more locked in before a single combine rolls to the field.

"I would say in the last three to five years, it's moved up significantly, following the fertilizer and chemical prepay businesses," says Beck's Hybrids' Bruce Kettler. And as seed prices continue to escalate, it becomes worthwhile for farmers to take advantage of early-order and prepay discounts.

"The seed bill has become a larger part of the total operating expense," Kettler adds.

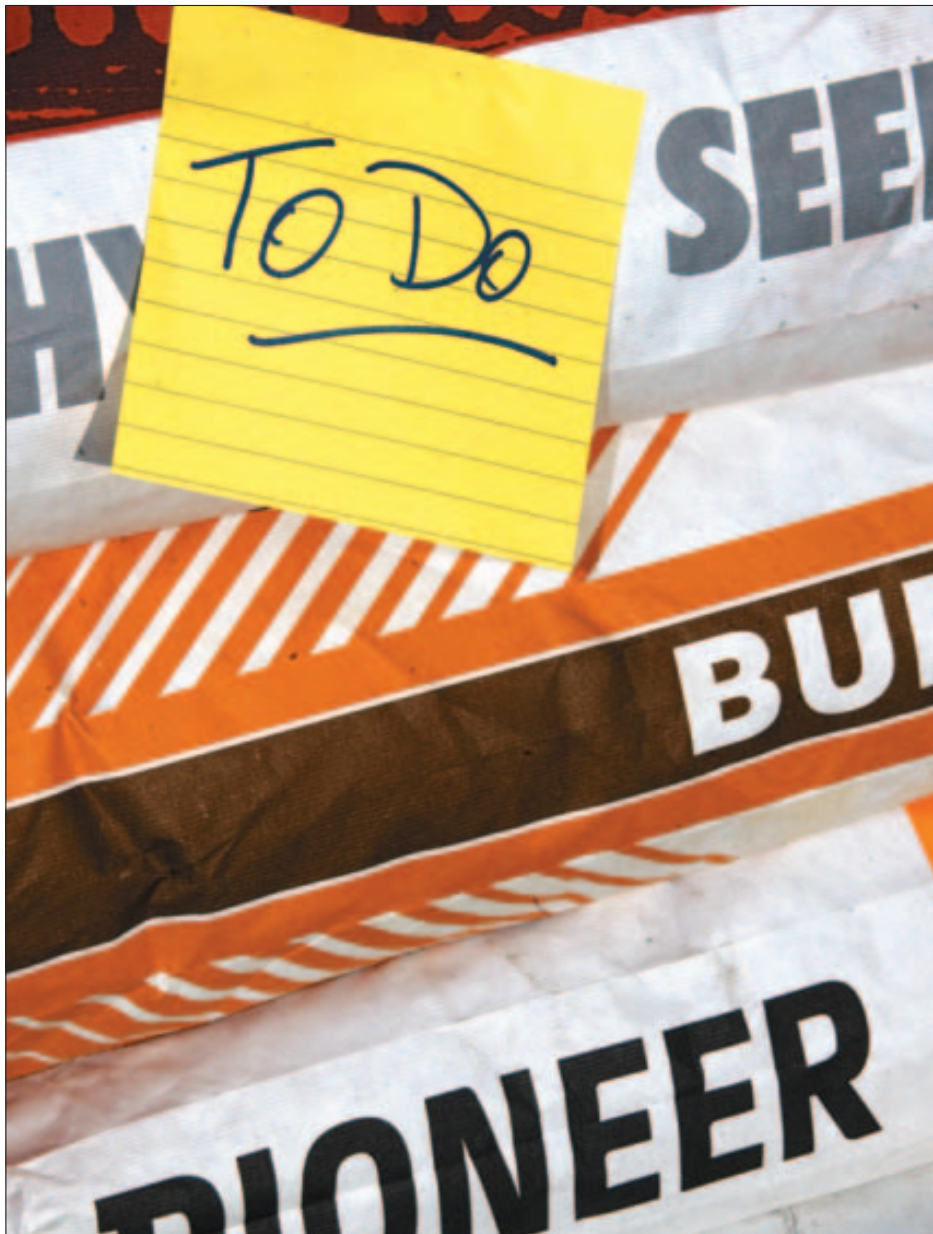
### Big-ticket items

For some farmers, it doesn't make a lot of sense to order a bag of seed before knowing how this year's crop performed, much less before that seed has even been priced. Like most companies, Burrus Hybrids will price its products in early October, after perhaps 70% of its 2009 sales have been booked. Tom Burrus allows that input prices are staggering, on all fronts, but in an effort to "make doing business with us easier for the grower, we'll tell customers they can cancel if they need to."

Like Burrus, many companies "lock in" early orders but will allow farmers to make changes and cancellations right up until planting — the only penalty being that you may not get the hybrid you want. Yet Burrus says making decisions based on the most recent year may not be foolproof.

"Growers always react to what they're dealing with right now. It's human nature," says Burrus. "But we rarely see a repeat of what we've had this year."

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