



BAG A DEAL: Seed choices are far more numerous than they appear, but competition for the best numbers drives early sales.

Early bird gets the seed?

By **HOLLY SPANGLER**

JUST as the old saying goes, the early bird gets the worm. And if that's true, then so may the early bird get the seed he wants — and the discounts, too.

Competition-fueled seed sales are taking place earlier and earlier, and this year, seed companies plan to capture farmers' attention with discount programs designed to lock in orders.

At Burrus Hybrids, for example, you'll get 10% off the top if you pay by Sept. 10, and the discount ratchets downward every month thereafter.

Beck's Hybrids starts with an early-order discount that takes off dollars per bag. And if you pay by Jan. 10, you'll get a cash discount of 10%, which ticks downward until summer of 2009. Buy a large volume, and you'll get a third discount — a quantity discount.

Tom Burrus says demand for the very best products and the very best choices in technology is driving the push to earlier sales.

"The grower wants to be sure he gets what he wants," Burrus adds.

He believes the advent of triple-stack technologies started it all. He also points out that 12 years ago, Burrus offered perhaps 12 hybrids, and they were all conventional. Two years ago, they offered 12 conventional hybrids and 40 technology-laden hybrids. This year,

Key Points

- Start hybrid selection by choosing your herbicide mode of action.
- Don't plan on any of this year's conditions repeating in 2009.
- Wet growing conditions could make seed supplies short next year.

with their acquisition of Hoblit Seeds, they'll offer 55.

"Now, you look at how to get the right quantity of seed and the right technology package, and it gets exponentially difficult," Burrus describes. "There will be shortages. If I knew what everyone would want, I could solve it. But I don't know that."

Picking and choosing

Given all the choices in seed offerings, where does a farmer start?

Burrus suggests that farmers make their herbicide decision first. Because most growers use just one system on their farm — either Roundup Ready or LibertyLink — that narrows the choices considerably. Then take a look at product families, and match products to soil types. And third, look at which technology products you need to get the right control measures.

"If you start with rootworm traits, you can get bogged down," Burrus says. "Start with the herbicide program and

it narrows off the products." Consider, too, products with multi-stacked traits, which let you apply either glyphosate or Ignite, formerly Liberty (see story below).

Personal experience may not cut it, either. Allyn Buhrow, a Pioneer sales representative from northern Illinois, points out that farmers used to be able to rely on experience, because each year they'd plant two or three hybrids they were familiar with and try a single new one. "There's not that kind of time now," he explains. "Guys are planting one they know and two or three new ones."

Buhrow adds that farmers need to be specific about their ordering and planting plans. To that end, he tries to learn as much as he can from the farmer about soil types, tillage practices and field histories, so he can help them match hybrids and traits to fields.

"When you look at the cost of a bag of seed, you can't afford to buy a bag and figure out where to put it in April," Buhrow says. "If I know what a grower wants and why, I can help him decide where he should put it, and what the best choice is."

Financing

Several entities are also ready to help farmers finance their seed purchases. Beck's works with outside ag financiers, offering a low-interest line of credit. As Bruce Kettler of Beck's points out, last year many farmers could pay their bill by Jan. 10, securing the 10% cash discount from Beck's, pay the lower interest rate later to the creditor and still come out with additional savings on their seed purchases.

Burrus expects several customers this year to take advantage of 0% financing offered by John Deere's Farmplan card, which allows them to order early and pay 0% interest through December 2009.

Supply chain

Just as farmers battled wet spring

They said it

"The last two to three years, farmers have had less familiarity with products. There's just so much to choose from."

Allyn Buhrow,
Pioneer Hi-Bred



"Because harvest will be later this year, we won't have as much sold by the end — maybe 70%. And we'll have maybe a third sold before harvest starts."

Tom Burrus, *Burrus Hybrids*

"Some customers are reluctant to talk to us early, but the large majority will get their orders in early because they know the hot genetics and traits will sell out."

Jason Gullidge, *Golden Harvest*



"Our objective is to have last year's sales and a little above by mid-September."

Bruce Kettler,
Beck's Hybrids

Ignite to replace Liberty herbicide

LIBERTY won't be Liberty for long. In 2009, look for a new formulation, to be called Ignite or, more formally, "Ignite for all LibertyLink crops." Bayer is rolling out the new formulation to coincide with the introduction of LibertyLink soybeans, also slated for 2009 availability.

The new formulation comes with a lower application rate and price tag, says Bayer's Eric Peters. Liberty's basic rate is 32 ounces, where the basic rate on Ignite is 22 ounces. Liberty was blue in color; Ignite will be red. And although price is not set, Bayer promises it should be more cost effective.

Why the name change? Bayer says because the rate change is significant, they wanted to avoid confusion. Plus, it brings in line a single formulation across all crops; Ignite can be used on LibertyLink corn, soybeans, cotton and canola.

weather, so did seed companies, struggling to get seed crops in the ground. Jason Gullidge, Golden Harvest, believes seed supplies in '09 will be an issue. "Some companies lost thousands of acres," he says. "We're fortunate to have a lot of our production acres located in areas where wet weather wasn't such a problem."

"We're advising customers to do their homework as early as they can this year. Make sure you figure out what you need and secure those orders as soon as you can."