

Plant your corn like a champion

By RICHARD DAVIS

DAVID Hula has won so many national corn championships, he found himself at a loss for words when asked how many. He and his brother, Johnny, who farm Renwood Farms near Charles City, Va., added to their championship wall again this year by growing more corn than any other producers in the nation.

How?

"We were very fortunate," David Hula says modestly. "We did have a fair amount of rain despite the drought. There were two pockets in Virginia that got some pretty timely showers, and we were in one."

He also gives someone else the credit. "Thanks to the good Lord looking over us," he says. "I like to think it is partially because we had the Ag Expo at our place this year, and I guess he wanted to make sure we had a good crop to show all the farmers."

Officially, the National Corn Growers Association considers the top finisher in each category of the National Corn Yield Contest a champion, but it is additionally impressive when a grower also leads the national champions in yield. That is what David did again this year. He produced 385.58 bushels per acre in his prize-winning entry. Johnny scored the second-highest corn yield in the nation, with 370.85 bushels per acre. And they did it in a part of the country that was undergoing a severe drought.

Both brothers entered no-till, strip-till irrigated corn.

David also finished first in his class in 2005, that time in the no-till, strip-till nonirrigated category. And he finished with the highest yields in the nation, both in 2004 and in 2003.

Off the starting line

When you grow 370 or 385 bushels of corn per acre, one of the secrets is getting off to a good start.

"We started off kind of wet early in the spring," David recalls. "Then we were extremely cool. After that, the rain kind of shut off. In fact, it is the only time I can remember harvesting an entire small-grain crop without getting any rain on the combine. Shortly after, we just got some timely rains that made the corn crop. When

Key Points

- Hula brothers scored highest corn yields in U.S. in 2007.
- David Hula considers corn meter calibration is a key.
- He says irrigation program changes improved their yields.

we were not getting adequate rain, we supplemented it with irrigation out of the James River."

David credits their consultant, Paul Bodenstein of Ag Systems, with developing a top-notch irrigation scheduling program for them.

David's entry variety was Pioneer 33M57, which includes Herculex, Liberty and Roundup technologies.

Johnny's variety was Dekalb DKC63-39, which includes Roundup Ready 2 and YieldGard Plus technology.

"We started out with a soil sample," David notes. "We're not in no-till anymore; we're in what we call 'never-till.' This field has not been tilled since the mid-1990s. We know that helps our water infiltration and complements our irrigation."

In January or February, they put as much as 250 pounds of potash down. That may seem a bit high, but they had a good reason.

"We put the potash down for complete rotation of corn and double-cropped soybeans so we're fertilizing for three

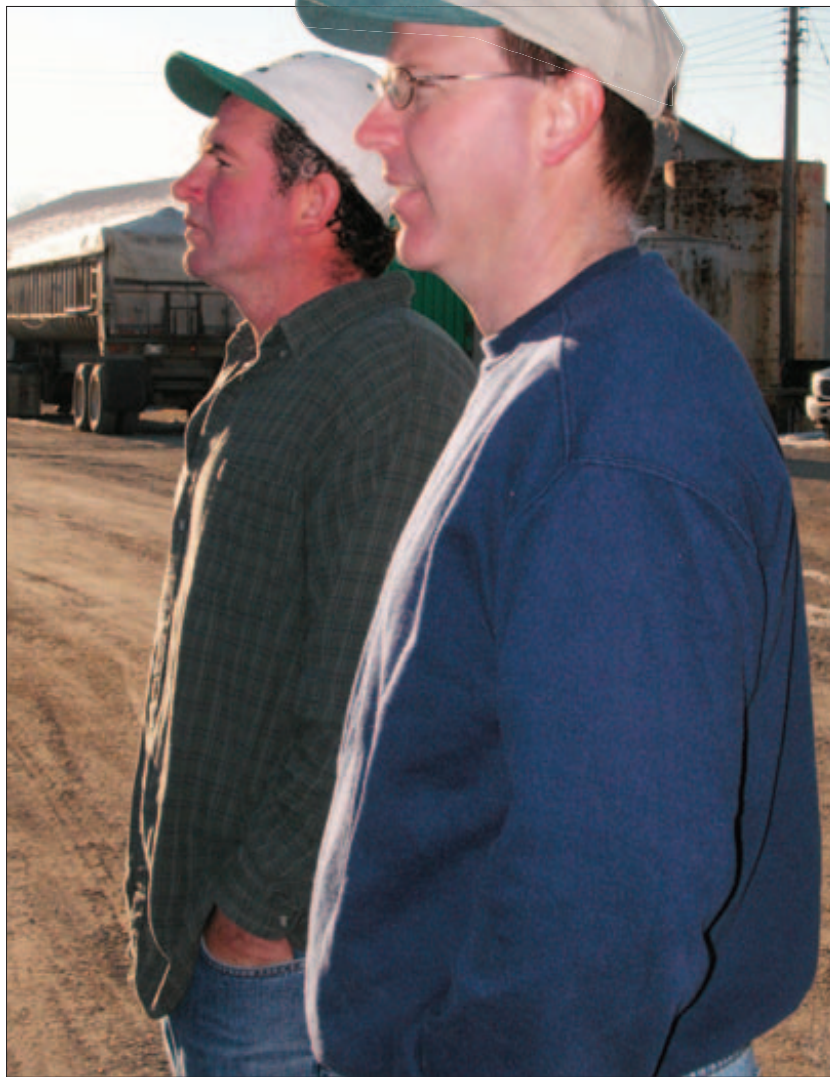


DAVID HULA

A good first step: Get corn meter calibrated

DAVID Hula is a firm believer in having one's corn meter calibrated. He sends his to Rob Garey in Delaware.

"If somebody is trying to increase their yields that is the least-expensive starting point they can do," David says, "to have great seed singulation dropping, to get that good uni-



FIRST AND SECOND: David Hula, (foreground) and his brother, Johnny, produced more corn yield than any other growers in the nation in 2007, finishing first and second in the no-till, strip-till irrigated class in the National Corn Growers Association's National Corn Yield Contest. David raised 385 bushels per acre and Johnny raised 370 bushels per acre.

crops with the potash," David explains. "Then, in the latter part of February or the first of March, we'll go in with some Sencor and some Roundup, so we're starting out with a weed-free environment. I believe the planting date for the corn was April 3. We use a Kinsey planter."

Renwood Farms is right along the banks of the James River, so they have to follow a lot of nutrient management programs to maintain water quality. As a result, they don't broadcast any nitrogen.

"In doing so, we put our

starter in a band 3 inches beside the seed, and we try to get it 2 inches below the seed," David explains. "The total plant feed we put in the starter is 66 pounds of N, 33 pounds of phosphate, 6½ pounds of sulfur, 0.6 pound of zinc and 0.1 pound of boron. That goes in a 'three by two.' We also use a starter in-furrow. We have sort of partnered with a company called Conklin, and they make some safener-type fertilizers that don't have the salt where it is going to burn the seedling.

"We applied a couple of gallons of a 9-18-9 in furrow. We

add a few other soil stimulants and other products. We do that with a Red Ball applicator."

The seed is basic

The Hulas are big into the seed business. But when David touts the importance of seed, his comments shouldn't be underestimated because he's in the business.

"We think seeds are the building blocks of the future," he says. "We have our seed treated with Poncho 250 insecticide to prevent any of the insect feeding at the seedling stage. We also wrap Amplify-L on the seed, a phosphate-based fertilizer that comes from Conklin. The Southeast is historically deficient in zinc, so we use a zinc product. It is a dry powder that we pour into the hopper along with Kernel Guard (insecticidal seed treatment) and stir up the treatments on the seed. We're protecting it from the insects as well as providing it with some initial fertilization just to get that seedling off to a good start."

form stand."

Both Hula brothers bumped their planting population up this year under irrigated fields. David was dropping right at 40,000 seeds, he says.

"That is a little bit high for us because we irrigate out of the James River, and it is tidal, so if we have extreme drought

we start getting the salinity coming upriver, and then we have to stop irrigating. This year we were dry, but evidently we weren't dry early enough so that it started impacting the water coming out of the river. We had a final stand of 39,000-and-something, which was good."