

Precision steering to cut costs

By WILLIE VOGT

CRAIG Wienbar knows a little about equipment overlap. The Palermo, N.D., producer has a 37-year history as a custom combine operator and knows what can happen with equipment drift and inaccurate steering in a field. While he retired from the combine business, he still farms more than 1,700 acres and wants to be sure in 2009 that he's doing something about overlap.

"Last year anhydrous cost \$1,350, and you don't want to overlap too much at those prices," he comments. While this year's nitrogen bill will drop, so did crop prices. He wants to make the most of every pass.

That's a key reason Wienbar took part in the Precision Start program. The program's aim is to put a precision steering system in the hands of a producer who hasn't looked at such a system. This story is the first in a series looking at Wienbar's experience with the technology and what it means for his operation.

Wienbar will work with an entry-level product from John Deere — a GreenStar Lightbar teamed with a StarFire 300 GPS receiver (see product details on the next page). The goal of the program is to offer readers still sitting on the fence information about how precision-guided manual steering can make a difference.

Wienbar says he passed on precision steering because he matched his planting and harvesting equipment. He uses a 36-foot air seeder and sprays with a 90-foot boom. His combine has a 30-foot head. With his harvesting experience, he figured he didn't really have to worry too much about his operational skill. "But I'm aware of the overlap," he adds.

A swap with 2 tractors

Wienbar is a typical central North Dakota producer, who raises a wide variety of crops. When asked what he'll grow in 2009, the list is long — winter wheat, spring wheat, durum, flax, safflower, oats, barley and peas. Add in a cow-calf business that includes some feeder cattle, and Wienbar is running a diversified operation.

The precision setup will be used on two different tractors. First, the system will be hooked up to his John Deere 8440 for spraying. Wienbar does a lot of burn-down application for his no-till operation. Then he'll move the equipment to his planting tractor, a Versatile 976.

Adds Joe Cunningham, Ag Management Systems tech: "This is pretty easy to move between tractors. The GPS receiver uses a magnetic mount, and the lightbar has a suction cup attachment. Wiring is pretty simple, too." Cunningham works with Gooseneck Implement, an eight-store chain with an operation in Stanley, N.D.

Wienbar farms with older equipment, but notes that the hours aren't too high. For example, that Versatile machine has only 5,000 hours on it. "When it comes to

Key Points

- Craig Wienbar, a North Dakota producer, is concerned about overlaps.
- A new lightbar will be put to work on his operation.
- Spraying and planting tasks are on the agenda.

maintenance, I do what needs to be done to keep equipment in shape," he adds.

Fritz Weisenberger, general manager of Gooseneck Implement in Stanley, supports the equipment. "This is the way it's going. Farmers are working to get the most of the labor they have."

Rainy weather ruled during a visit to North Dakota to start this series. Next month this feature will connect with

GIVING IT A TRY: Craig Wienbar is putting a new lightbar into his spraying tractor that he'll also transfer to his planting rig for his Palermo, N.D., operation.



Wienbar to learn more about his field experience with the lightbar setup. Check Farmer Iron — The Blog at www.TheFarmerStockman.com for updates on the Precision Start program.

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