

NewsWatch

Operator still needed

By P.J. GRIEKSPoor

GREAT Bend farmer Roger Brining says he originally thought automatic guidance systems on his tractor would allow him to put a less experienced operator in the seat to handle chores such as planting corn.

"I thought: OK, the tractor drives and turns itself. I can put a high school kid in the cab and I'm good," he says.

But he soon discovered that wasn't to be.

"What is required is a different skill set," Brining says. "As long as everything works, the tractor does all the work." But that isn't the case if something goes wrong.

"When something isn't working the way it's supposed to, then diagnosing the problem and fixing it is a whole new situation," he says. "And there is a lot to watch and to keep up with."

Brining admits some errors are his own, and operator error can also be costly.

"I ran a computer and Internet business for 10 years, so the technology is absolutely not a problem. But the basics of operating a planter — that is new," he says.

"Last year, our first year using this technology, I had areas in the field where I didn't

Key Points

- Autoguidance requires different skill set, but skill still is needed.
- When technology works, it's great; fixing it takes training.
- Operator error does happen, and it can be costly.

have enough down pressure on the planter and the seed didn't go deep enough. That had nothing to do with the precision ag stuff; that was my lack of knowledge about using a planter. My dad didn't do row crops. I didn't learn that."

The bottom line, Brining



WHICH WAY: Turning at the end of the row is as easy as clicking on the correct arrow.

says, is that robot tractors working without a body in the cab are probably a long, long way in the future.



ALL NOZZLES: As each nozzle begins to spray, a light indicates it is operating. If a nozzle clogs or quits, the light for that row goes out.



SET THE FLOW: A programming screen allows setup of spray rate, speed and other details for application over an entire field.

Fertilizer technology detects plant health while in the field

CAN you imagine having sensors on your fertilizer applicator that can tell how healthy your plants are and adjust nitrogen application to their greenness?

Well, it is out there. Two products, Crop Circle and Green Seeker, were on display at the Aug. 5 Agriculture Technology Field Day at Great Bend.

Green Seeker, from NTech Industries, is an improvement on satellite mapping systems that allows the generation of a management zone map even on cloudy days.

Crop Circle, from Trimble Agriculture, allows GPS lightbar sensing display and mapping technology that provides 1-inch accuracy for farm field maps.

No coverage, no aid

IT'S in the new farm bill's fine print: To be eligible for disaster assistance on 2009 summer crops, you must have crop insurance coverage — on all insurable fall-planted crops. That means signing up before the Sept. 30 deadline for winter wheat, barley, oats, rye and forage production. For apples, pears and grapes, the deadline is Nov. 20. For potatoes, it's Dec. 31.



Management Agency. That's if you want to be eligible for 2009 disaster aid on next year's insured crops.

Disaster aid under the new Supplemental Revenue Assistance Program has seen changed rules. Unfortunately, "SURE's new rules haven't been published yet," Eliassen adds.

"So the safest advice seems to be: If a crop is insurable in your county, insure every acre of it. If

it's not insurable, but the Noninsured Assistance Program is available, then sign up for NAP. If you have questions about crops not falling into either category, check with your local Farm Service Agency office."

The new farm bill requires crop insurance on every acre of any insurable crop or Noninsured Assistance Program coverage on all acres of uninsurable crops, clarifies Jan Eliassen, consultant for USDA's Risk

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