

THE LEADING EDGE

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A PUBLICATION DEDICATED TO MAXIMIZING YIELD POTENTIAL

Speed Up Planting Without Sacrificing Quality

Efficiency is the key to smarter, faster planting

Planting used to be a tedious task. Driving skills rivaling NASCAR-level were helpful and markers were dependable only in some conditions. Fertilizer application required frequent stops for refilling, and seed needed to be reloaded often as well.

It's true that no one has found a way to make driving and planting at high speeds profitable. However, today's farmers are adopting new technologies and equipment more quickly than anticipated, and through these innovations, planting is becoming more efficient and less wearisome.

Tractors with guidance systems



Operators have found many

Relying on your tractor with GPS to execute straight rows and enable planting at night is quickly eliminating the need for markers in the planting setup. Most tractors are now manufactured with the ability to handle GPS-directed steering systems. The technology has proven successful for early adapters, and now

benefits from auto steer including planting in high residue conditions.

Planter advancements



Central fill individual row-unit shut-offs, and electronically adjusted residue managers from the cab are among many technologies that help 120 ` planters seed up to 1000 acres per day.

Central-fill planters get high marks in efficiency. "The trend definitely has gone to central fill," says AGCO's Gary Hamilton, a White planter senior marketing specialist.¹ Some industry estimates show that 75% of new planters are being ordered with a hydraulic drive option. That percentage will continue to increase, in part because many large planters are no longer available with ground drives. Hydraulic drives also enable variable rate population and row unit shut-offs.

Add sophisticated controllers to the mix if you want to fully take advantage of this technology. These controllers allow farmers to change planting population from the cab to adapt to changing conditions. They are also capable of map-based seeding--a pre-determined and programmed seeding plan uploaded by farmers. Experts predict this convenience could be next on the list of technologies to adopt when planting.

the majority of producers are jumping on board.

"Auto-steering" as it is also known, not only increases seeding accuracy, it also enables producers to plant into heavy residue conditions and after sunset, greatly increasing the number of acres that can be planted each day.

Large-frame planters—24-rows and wider—are in demand as producers manage more acres. Some wide planter designs make use of steerable rear axles and dual-purpose wing wheels to improve stability during transit.

Bulk seed handling solutions

For both central- and individual-row-unit-fill planters, bulk seed handling equipment is another way to speed the planting process by cutting down on the time it takes to reload seed.

Today's seed handling systems are designed to be incredibly versatile and have proven to be effective across all types of production agriculture operations. Bulk seed handling has several advantages beyond faster seed handling and planter-filling:

- It reduces the opportunity for back injury from handling bags.
- There is less waste of materials and fewer disposal problems for reusable bulk bags compared with smaller, disposable seed bags.
- The person handling the seed may have less exposure to the chemicals used to treat the seed.

When selecting bulk seed handling equipment to fill Central Commodity System (CCS) planters, look for products that attach directly to a gravity wagon or tender have the capability to move seed from a bulk container to a drill or planter via a stream of air, and a powerful enough motor to keep the seed moving through the decelerator. Integration of the main handling system with a cart for use with bulk seed boxes is also key efficiency ingredient.

A powerful conveyor in a bulk seed system keeps things moving quickly. Look for products whose engines have solid horsepower and variable-speed control, as well as hydraulically driven belts. Units that use air to move seed along the conveyor are sure to be gentle enough. Look for flexibility features such as the ability to operate as a self-contained unit or be added to a gravity wagon. A telescoping downspout is also a good addition.



Bulk seed handling products lower the amount of time it takes to refill the planter, increasing efficiency in the planter operation.

Innovative and efficient fertilizer integration

Integrating planting with the application of starter fertilizer is an efficient process that, when done correctly, results in crops getting the nutrients they need at critical root-development stages and throughout the growing season.

Buying expensive, new equipment is not the only option. For example, Louie Nigg from Peever, South Dakota, built his own air-assist fertilizer delivery system for his John Deere 1770 NT 16-row planter.

"I started by attaching a 150-bu. Concord 1502 air cart to the back of the planter to supply the dry fertilizer," Nigg said. "New, the cart sells for well over \$10,000. But I bought a used 1986 model for \$1,500."



Four wheel steer carts increase liquid fertilizer carrying capacity while lowering compaction and frequent stops to refill.

Nigg added two custom-designed and custom-built 5-foot-tall towers to the toolbar to divert fertilizer. The tower and splitters ran about \$2,000. The hoses and manifolds cost roughly \$500, so total expenses came to about \$2,500 plus the air cart.

Another option to cover more acres with each fill while applying starter fertilizer is a high-capacity fertilizer cart to apply fertilizer, or later, herbicide and insecticide. Carts with capacities of 2,000-gallon are on the market today.

Planter attachments also play the efficiency game

Manufacturers of planter attachments are also providing innovative solutions for efficiency while planting.

Residue managers, an important part of the planting setup for no-till and minimum-tillage operations, often need adjustment to operate effectively and work as designed in changing soil conditions. Rather than leaving the tractor cab to make these changes, opt for electronically-controlled managers that adjust with the touch of a button from the cab. On-the-go adjustments save producers valuable time.

Floating residue managers, while not necessarily adjustable from the cab, are another option for efficient residue management while planting. Look for models with that have a down-stop that can be activated to allow the residue manager to float up and down, following the field terrain.

Options abound for increased planting efficiency

Sometimes bigger is better when it comes to increasing planting efficiency, such as large-frame planters or high-capacity fertilizer carts. However, new equipment is not always required to amp up planting effectiveness. Whatever combination of options producers choose, a more efficient planting system often results in an earlier planting completion date, the number one way to increase yield potential.

1 Smart Planters, Farm Industry News, David Hest, 2009-02-01.

2 Modified Planter Uses Air Cart to Efficiently Deliver Fertilizer to Row Units, Greg Lamp, Corn and Soybean Digest, Feb. 15, 2010

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