

Give Your Planter a Tune-Up

Winter months provide perfect time to perform maintenance

Planting season is fast approaching, and now is the ideal time to inspect your planter to ensure it is in proper working order. Take advantage of these cold winter months to do a thorough inspection. Planter maintenance is important—catching problems now can save you from costly delays in the field or other problems that might affect your yield. Having a local dealer or service shop inspect your planter is one option, but if you'd like to do it yourself, the following checklist is a great starting point.

Inspect your toolbar

- Check the working conditions of chains, tensioners, cables, wiring, and idler pulleys
- Inspect hydraulic hoses for leaks
- Replace hoses that cannot be repaired
- Inspect tires for wear or cracks
- Check air pressure in tires
- Inspect bearings
- Inspect gauge wheels

Inspect your row units

Seed meters

- Inspect your metering unit to prevent skips, doubles, and triples
- Calibrate your meter and inspect it for signs of damage or wear. Replace parts if necessary

Coulters (unit mount, frame mount, and fertilizer coulters)

- Check the diameter of the coulters and replace any that are excessively worn

Rubber seals

- Replace any that are worn

Parallel linkage arms

- Replace any worn parts, as they could cause the planter to become unbalanced

Row cleaners

- Check row cleaners for wear
- Check bearings
- Check pivot bushings (floating models only)
- Check hardware for tightness



Levelness of the planter is crucial to ensure it will work properly.

Seed opener discs

- Worn, cracked, or warped blades will affect seed placement
- Replace blades less than 14.5" in diameter
- Shim blades properly to allow 1.5" of contact

Seed tubes

- Inspect the seed tube guard for wear
- Inspect the tubes themselves for holes, splits, cracks, and end wear

Seed firmers

- Check for wear—may need replacement

Seed boxes

- Inspect seed boxes for holes, cracks, and cleanliness
- Check seed box alignment—improper alignment could cause the meter to drop seed into the seed tube

Closing wheels

- Use the Yetter Checker to ensure proper alignment of closing wheels



Uniform spacing is crucial to achieving even emergence. A seed meter or GPS that is not correctly calibrated can lead to questionable spacing and put a damper on your yield.



The Checker from Yetter Farm Equipment attaches to a hydraulic jack and makes checking adjustments and alignments of the row unit and attachments easy and accurate.

Take three samples from your test pass while measuring to test the depth and spacing of each seed. Be sure to look for doubles or misses. If you notice a consistent problem after checking your test samples, recheck your planter. While testing in the fields, also test your wheel down-pressure and seed trench closing.

Be wary of temporary fixes

Dan Anderson, an experienced farm machinery mechanic and writer, noted that “creative repairs” can “impinge on safety.”² The full blog post, entitled “Tarp Straps, Duct Tape and Zip Ties,” discusses the potential safety issues associated with temporary repairs. Remember, temporary fixes are *temporary*. A properly maintained planter is key to a successful season, so don’t let your temporary fix lead to long-term problems. Duct tape and zip ties can only do so much.

Planter maintenance is crucial

Maintaining your planter is one of the most essential processes to ensure higher yields and uniform seed placement. Seed placement and seeding rate cannot be changed after the seedlings come up, so it is critical that your planter be in its best shape before planting.

- If no row checker is available, you may set your planter on concrete, then pull ahead about five feet. “Look at the mark left behind the planter by the double disk openers. The mark should run right down the centerline between the closing wheels. If a closing wheel is running too close to the mark, adjust the closing wheels to bring it back to center.”¹

Bushings

- Check for wear at all pivot points

Drive system

- Check every chain
- Also check drive cables where chains are not used

Keep your technology running smoothly

Farmers today use a wide range of technologies when planting. These devices should be checked as well when doing your general planter inspection.

- GPS – Double check measurements and calibrations for GPS positioning
- Electronics – Check for any damage to wiring harnesses or other cords (corrosion, etc.) and make sure your electronics are communicating properly and are properly calibrated
- Hydraulic drives – Check for leaking due to cracked hoses or loose fittings
- Shut offs – Follow manufacturer’s preseason maintenance recommendations. Some shutoffs may require grease or oil to keep them functioning properly

Perform an in-field test

Check the planter operating height and make sure the planter is level. Then check the frame height as well based on the operating manual specifications. Make a test pass in a dry portion of your field. At 100-foot intervals, plant 25-foot strips on flat land using your typical planter speed.

Once planting is finished for the season, be sure to follow manufacturer guidelines for planter and fertilizer system clean out and storage.

Endnotes

1 “Planter Tune-up Tips,” Precision Planting, <http://www.precisionplanting.com/Service-Education/Education/Planting-Tips.aspx>

2 Anderson, D., “Tarp Straps, Duct Tape and Zip Ties,” July 30, 2013, http://www.agweb.com/blog/in_the_shop/tarp_straps_duct_tape_and_zip_ties/

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