

Harvest Is Over ... Now What?

Planning for 2014 looms large

After wrapping up what was for many a volatile harvest, growers may be ready for a deserved break. But there is no rest for the weary, especially in the ever-changing agriculture industry. It's the time of year to begin making decisions for 2014, and that process can be complex.

When laying out a plan for your growing season, there are many factors to consider. Below are some you may want to include when you plan.

Analyze your yield data

There are many factors in play when it comes to your crop yield. Some factors that may have dragged down your yield in the past can be avoided in the future. For example, uniformity, stand count, and erosion are all factors that can be controlled if the proper plan is in place.

Uniformity problems can be caused by reduced germination rates due to a cold, wet spring. Strip-till may provide a solution. Strip-till keeps soil warmer and ensures it is drier at planting. Both stand count and uniformity can also be improved by maintaining a consistent planting depth and better seed-to-soil contact.

Erosion can be combated through the use of min-till, no-till, strip-till, or vertical tillage, all of which require fewer field passes. The residue left on the surface of the soil also helps to keep it in place, further combating erosion.

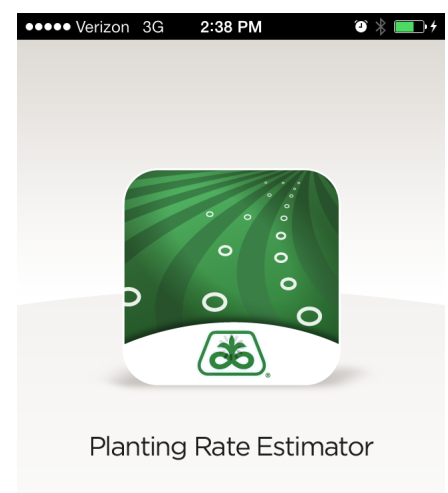
Another factor that could be robbing your yield is soil compaction. You can learn about soil compaction and other soil health factors in the October 2013 issue of the *Leading Edge*: [Make Soil Health Choices With The Future in Sight](#).

Seed and population choices

Ev Thomas, a Pioneer employee and professor at Iowa State University, and Bill Mahanna, president of Oak Point Agronomics Ltd, teamed up to review corn population and row width in the article "Corn populations and row width deserve review," in *Hoard's Dairyman*. They say when it comes to grain yield production from individual plants, "The major gain has come from the genetic selection of corn hybrids for stress tolerance which has accounted for gains of 1 to 1.5 bushels per year in yield over the past 80 years."¹

Population, seed treatment, harvest window, and field

conditions are all factors that can be considered when making a seed selection.² Many different seed companies provide free mobile apps or on-line resources to help with the decision-making process when it comes to planting rate and seed selection. A local agronomist or seed expert can also be a valuable resource when making your population, row spacing, or seed variety choices.



Pioneer® offers a planting rate estimator app that gives your hybrid specific planting rate estimates.

Review your management practices

It may seem obvious, but it's worth a reminder: If you used any test plots or different methods to produce your crop this year, go to that data for insights as you plan the following year. Are any worth implementing on a larger scale? After reviewing this data, if you are still unsure of whether or not to implement a new practice, consult an expert or online resource. Extension office websites of the university in your region can be great sources of online information for farmers. Now is also a good time to plan for future experimentation with different farming practices and/or products.



Many farms are experimenting with cover crops. Shown here is an experiment where strip till is being used in a cover crop with [Yetter Maverick™ HR Plus](#) strip-till units.



Vertical tillage machines have become quite popular on many farms. Some operations have chosen to adapt [vertical tillage attachments](#) for existing chisel plows or field cultivators to drastically reduce the cost of getting into this practice.

Experiment with cover crops

One management practice experiencing a revival as sustainable agriculture gains momentum is the use of cover crops. Cover crops can help with moisture management and compaction, as well as several other issues. Different cover crops provide different benefits. Producers considering cover crops must have a clear goal in mind and choose the cover crop to match.

Cover crops can:

- Generate additional residue cover that reduces water evaporation when moisture is scarce.
- Improve soil structure and break up compaction.
- Protect the soil during winter months.
- Mobilize and recycle nutrients.
- Serve as a crop rotation.
- Control weeds and pests—an increasing problem as winters become warmer.

Read more about cover crop benefits and planning in the *Leading Edge* article [Improve Next Season's Outlook With Cover Crops](#).

Fertilizer purchase

While environmental changes can make your year-to-year planning more complex, one thing may be more pleasant to check off the off-season to-do list this year: fertilizer selection and purchase. “We’re seeing significant cuts in fertilizer prices for N, phosphate and potash compared to this time last year. As a result, farmers can expect to see sizable reductions in fertilizer costs for 2014, especially when making purchases this fall,” said [Chad Hart](#), an Iowa State University agricultural economist for Farm Industry News.

One of the biggest advantages of planning ahead for the upcoming year when it comes to fertilizer is being able to lock in a low price. Hart says this year looks to be better for fertilizer prices for fall and spring application.³

What tools will you use?

The type of tools you use will depend on which farming practices you choose for the upcoming year. It is always important to make sure that everything is in good working order before you take it to the field. The off-season is the time to assess your tools, perform regular maintenance, and make repairs.

Evaluate any new equipment purchases carefully. There are many factors you may consider when deciding whether you will make an equipment purchase, such as the cost of the piece of equipment, how often you will use it, and durability.

Remain flexible

Above all, it is important to remember to be flexible with the plan you lay out for next year. Though lessons learned from years before and data collected are valuable insights to help plot the course for a profitable year, the last few years are evidence that Mother Nature’s hold over harvest is still a strong one, no matter how much agricultural technology has advanced to work around her.

Endnotes

- 1 http://www.hoards.com/E_crops/cf30
- 2 <http://farmprogress.com/story-start-2014-seed-selection-9-103906>
- 3 <http://farindustrynews.com/fertilizer/2014-fertilizer-price-forecast-lower-bills-ahead>

Visit www.yetterco.com to review past issues of the *Leading Edge* and to find Yetter products that maximize your yield potential.

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Yetter Manufacturing Co., Inc. | 109 S. McDonough | Colchester, Illinois 62326
Phone: 800-447-5777 | FAX: 309-776-3222 | www.yetterco.com | E-mail: info@yetterco.com