Changing Hybrids On-The-Go Boosts Yields

"We think one of the best ways to boost yields is by switching hybrids as the planter is rolling through the field," says Jason Webster, Director of the Illinois Precision Farm Research for Beck's Hybrids. "We researched this concept at two locations near Downs, Ill., in 2012 and found that it can lead to a 20 bushel an acre advantage over planting the same hybrid across the whole field. At today's prices, that can mean significantly more income."

The Becks research team conducted the tests using an "offensive" high yield hybrid on the best parts of the test fields and a "defensive" hybrid on the lower producing parts of the fields.

Researchers modified a Kinze 3500 8-row planter. The 3500 was originally set up as an 8/7 row configuration for interplanting on 15-in. spacing. Webster says to get 8 row units on the front they had to cut the hitch apart and expand two mounting arms so 8 pusher row planting units in 30-in. row spacing could be mounted on the main frame. Those row units were offset 8 in. from the rear rows. Webster says they chose that configuration because it was important to see the row shift in the field so they could evaluate the hybrids during the growing season. Both sets of row units were equipped with hydraulic motors so they could turn the boxes on and off depending on which hybrid they wanted to plant.

Webster says the key to making this research concept work is knowing the different soil types, fertility levels and past yield performance within a given field.

Webster says, "farmers used to describe their fields as 'this one is good, that one's better and the land down there is the best.' They'd put the best hybrid on the field that was flat, black and beautiful and choose something else for the others. Now we can apply that same description within individual fields. Management Zones define the good, better and best areas within a field. It's an extremely accurate method of predicting which areas of a field have the highest yield potential."

Becks ran their 2012 tests on farms in Ford County, Ill. The hybrids were also planted at different population levels, from 28,000 to 30,000 for the defensive hybrid and 34,000 to 36,000 for the offensive hybrid.

Harvest results showed that the offensive hybrid produced its best yields at 34,000 plants per acre while the defensive hybrid in the secondary zones did best at 28,000 seeds per acre. As population levels increased in the lower producing zones the yields decreased just over 11 bushels an acre.

Becks Hybrids used a custom-built Kinze 8-row planter to research the concept of planting 2 different hybrids in a field at the same time.

Although the 2012 trials were only one year, Webster thinks that changing hybrids and population levels within Management Zones has merit. The company has built another planter and will run more corn tests in 2013. They also plan to run bean variety comparisons on the fields that had corn last year.

"Variable rate seeding with different hybrids within a field is one way we can reach toward that 300 bushel yield level and produce more income per acre," Webster says.

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3-Pt. Mounted Boat Hauler

Launching his boat into water is no sweat for Russell Whitworth, Zalma, Mo., who built a tractor-mounted boat hauler out of an old 3-pt. mounted sprayer.

"I made it so I could fish by myself in a river on my land and in some local farm ponds and lakes. I can launch or recover the boat by myself without any lifting or getting my feet wet," says Whitworth.

He stripped the sprayer down to a big 3-pt. mounted horseshoe-shaped bracket and subframe on front. He used angle iron to build a 5-ft. wide frame and welded it to the bracket. The boat rides on a series of 2-in. dia. plastic pipes spaced 1 ft. apart, which ride over lengths of 1 1/2-in. dia. steel pipe to act like rollers. Both sides of the boat are contained by side rails made of lightweight unistrut.

Whitworth also replaced the 3-pt.'s top link with a hydraulic cylinder which allows the boat hauler to tilt down into the water.

"It works great and gets a lot of stares on local roads," says Whitworth. "I use it to haul my 10-ft. Pond Prowler fishing boat equipped with an electric motor. I had been using a small trailer made for the boat and pulling it behind my 4-wheeler, but using the tractor is a lot easier. I can drive right up to the boat and load it without ever having to get off the tractor.

"To load the boat I just slide the boat onto the pipe rollers. When I arrive at the pond I lower the boat into the water and climb off the back of the tractor and into the boat."

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Russell Whitworth built this tractor-mounted boat hauler out of an old 3-pt. mounted sprayer. The boat rolls up on a series of 2-in. dia. plastic pipes spaced 1 ft. apart.

"I use it to haul my 10-ft. fishing boat equipped with an electric motor. I can drive right up to the boat and load it without ever getting off the tractor," says Whitworth.

Feed-Saving Covered Bale Feeder

Chris Prewett, Kingston, Ga., got tired of watching hay go to waste inside his bale feeder.

"Horses would eat out the center of the bale which eventually caused the bale to collapse, and then when it rained the entire bale got wet from top to bottom and became moldy," he says. "So I came up with a portable covered bale feeder that keeps the bales dry, yet is light enough to be pulled by a 4-wheeler," he says.

The feeder is 6 ft. wide by 10 ft. long and has a sloping galvanized metal roof that measures 9 ft. 8 in. high at the peak. The unit's 28-in. high sides consist of 1 by 6-in. deck boards screwed onto steel uprights, which are tach-welded to a pair of skids made from 4-in. dia. galvanized tubing. A hinged gate on front of the feeder can be lowered to the ground, allowing Prewett to roll bales by hand up the ramp and onto the floor.

"I've used it for two years without losing any hay to mold at all," says Prewett. "I don't need a tractor to move the feeder around or even to load it. I just roll the bale up the ramp or drop it out the back of my pickup bed. The entire bale stays dry so my horses eat it all the way down to the floor. I also use it to feed small square bales. I stack 12 bales at a time in 2 layers, cutting the strings off as I set each bale down."

Hinged gate on front of feeder lowers to the ground, allowing Prewett to roll bales up the ramp by hand.

Prewett made the floor by tach-welding lengths of wire panel onto a galvanized steel frame. "I wanted to leave the floor open so that hay seeds will fall through onto the ground and grow after I move the feeder," he says.

"To move the feeder I attach chains to metal loops welded onto the front end of both skids. I cut the front end of the skids at an angle so they'll slide over the ground without digging in."

The gate hinges on a length of 1-in. sq. tubing that runs inside a 1 1/4-in. dia. pipe. "The design means I don't have to worry about the hinge gumming up with mud and rusting or breaking like an ordinary hinge would," says Prewett.

Portable covered bale feeder keeps bales dry, yet is light enough to be pulled by a 4-wheeler.

He says his total cost was close to $900, including time and labor. "I already had the square tubing that I used for the frame, the galvanized tubing for the skids, and the wire panel for the floor," he notes.

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