

Plant Breeder Advises Farmers On Conducting Own Corn Trials

"The only good corn hybrids are the ones that give you high yields. The hybrid that produces 200 bushels per acre somewhere else isn't worth a lead nickel to you if it doesn't produce high yields on your land," an agronomist recently stated.

How do you find out which hybrids are best for you? One way is to run your own hybrid corn trials, says Dr. R. H. Cole, chairman of the department of agronomy at the University of Delaware.

Cole says good advice on running your own corn trials was reported by William D. Pardee, Cornell University plant breeder, in March, 1967. Crops and Soils magazine Pardee recommends testing only four to six hybrids at a time; choose varieties that look good in nearby experiment station trials or those your neighbors are excited about. The plot for each hybrid should be at least four rows wide by several hundred feet long. Don't be tempted to compare big blocks planted to each hybrid, Pardee cautions. Differences due to soil variation often can be greater than the differences between the varieties you are testing.

Plant all hybrids the same day in the same way, use equal rates of fertilizer and the same herbicides. If your field slopes, run your plots up and over the slope so that each hybrid has an equal chance to grow on low and high ground. In short, Pardee writes, treat the plots alike in every way so you can measure differences between varieties, not differences in handling.

How can you tell whether the differences you get are actual differences due to soil or other variations?

Your best bet is to run duplicate tests in several fields, and then figure average yields for each hybrid. If the hybrids rank the same in each test—then a five bushel difference may be enough to indicate an economically significant difference between these hybrids.

If the hybrids rank differently between fields, with one hybrid tops in one field but only middling in another, then look for at least 10 bushels yield before deciding that one

Pardee advises.

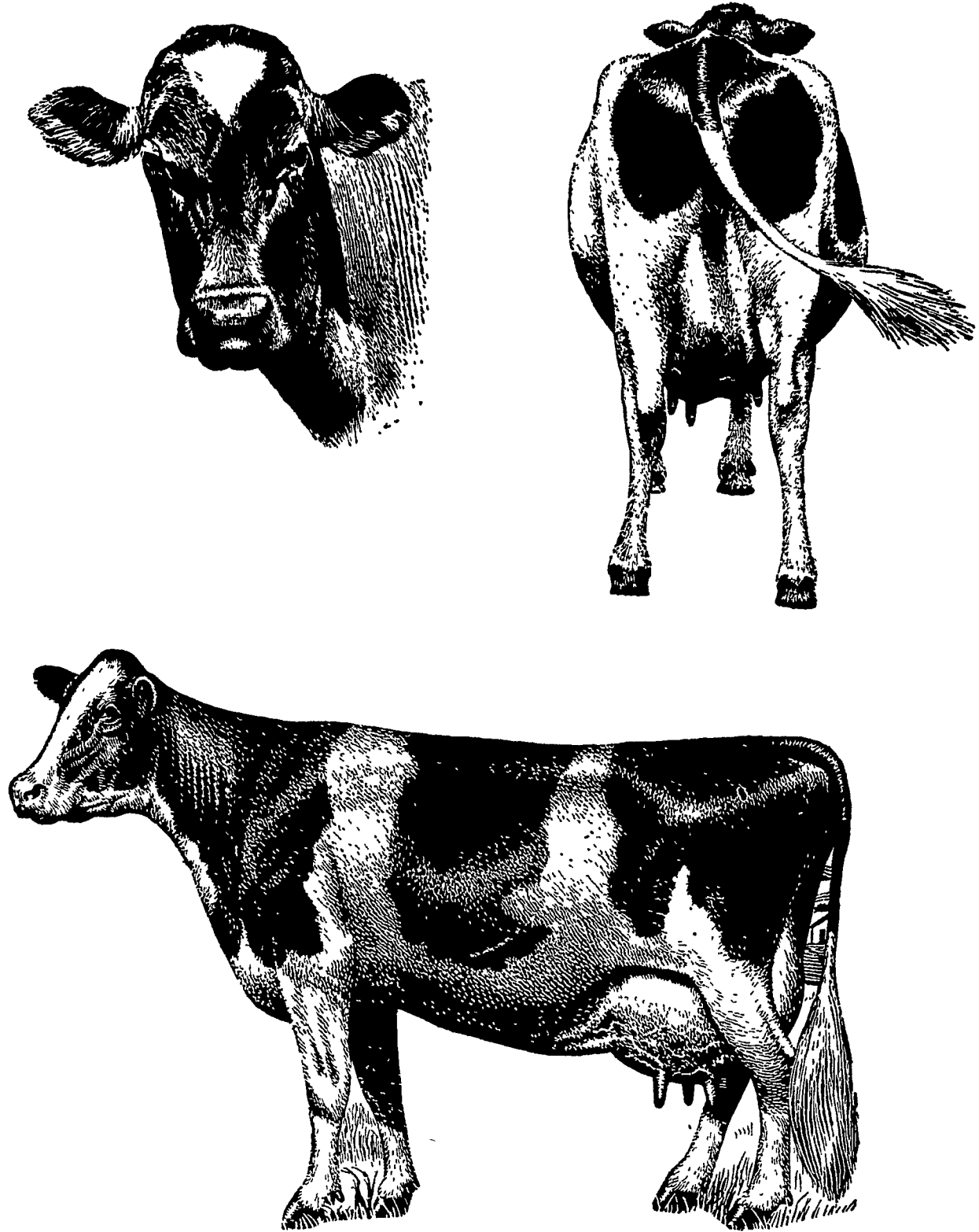
If your tests don't look at all alike from field to field, with a test-topper in one field hitting bottom in another, and no apparent similarity—then look for at least 15 bushels difference in average yield be-

fore you decide you've measured a difference that's economically significant, the plant breeder said.

This rule-of-thumb guide differs from the precise statistical significance computed by experiment stations for their

tests. Still, it gives a rough approximation of how good the testing effort was, how reliable the results were, and how many bushels difference needed before gambling that one hybrid is better than another, he concluded.

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