

Early corn planting is key to bigger yields

LANCASTER — Corn farmers are urged to plant early and shallow. It's one of the easiest ways to be certain of increasing corn profits without adding to production costs.

There are several reasons why early planting means bigger yields, but the main reason centers around the crop developing and growing under conditions that are more favorable to higher yields. Plants respond more efficiently to water, nutrients and energy, producing more grain with essentially the same inputs. What's more, grain from early planted corn tends to be higher in test weight.

Optimum planting date for corn naturally varies with the season and location - from mid-March in southern areas to early May in some northern or high altitude areas.

Growers only need to plant 1 to 1½ inches deep if they plant early. The new precision depth planters that are now available make it easy to control planting depth.

A recent depth of planting

demonstration at Greenville, Ohio, demonstrated the importance of shallow planting. Corn planted 1 inch deep yielded 150.6 bushels, 2 inches - 135.9 bushels and 3 inches - 131.7 bushels.

Corn is reasonably well-protected from freeze damage until the plants are about 12 inches tall. The growing point is at or below the ground until then and is protected from freezing by surrounding soil unless an unusually long, hard freeze occurs.

Leaves may be frozen back but as long as the growing point survives, plants will resume growth and put out new leaves in a short time.

While one cannot promise you'll never lose a stand because of a spring freeze, it won't happen often. The alternative of delaying planting until there's no chance of a freeze is far too costly.

Stand establishment may be more difficult with early planting but chemical treatment of seed and soil, plus high quality seed, largely overcome this.

To allow for some seed loss,

scientists suggest planting up to 2,000 more seeds per acre when planting early. This allows a little lee-way for slower less complete germination and emergence. Plus, early planted corn suffers less population stress so more plants can contribute to additional yields.

Another potential problem: early growth may tend to be slow with early planting. High fertility and proper fertilizer placements helps counteract this.

Weed control becomes very important when corn is planted early. Pre-emergence herbicides are particularly valuable allies.

A summary of these benefits of early planting:

- spreads spring workload.
- allows for early harvest in better weather with reduced field loss and more time for fall tillage.
- helps produce shorter, sturdier stalks.
- results in higher grain to stover ratio - better quality silage.
- harvest of higher test weight grain.
- results in greater efficiency in nutrient-utilization.
- allows silking and tasseling to occur before most heat and drought stress periods.

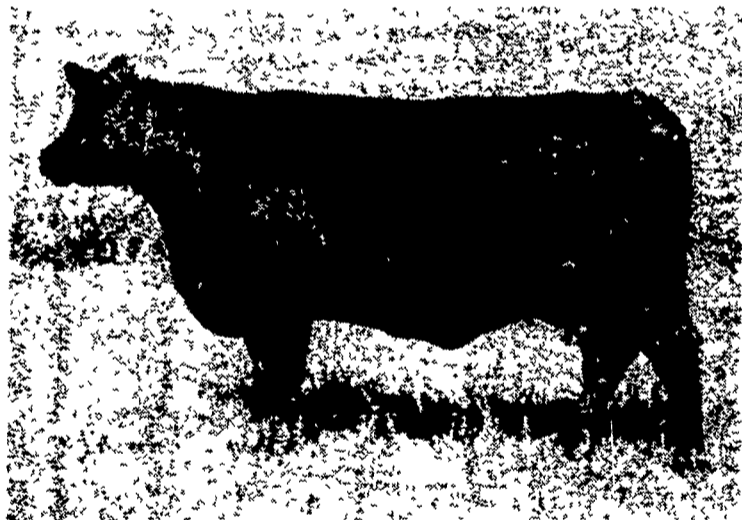
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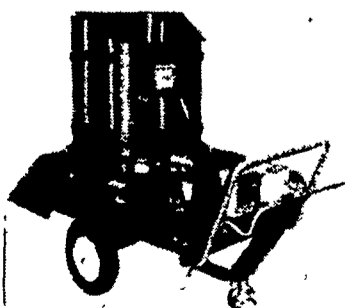
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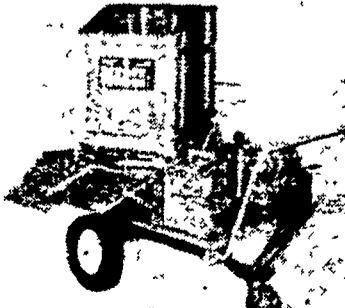
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