

Checkoff vital to soybean research

DES MOINES, Ia. — Would you like to farm with the tractor you bought 20 years ago?

That's about what you'd be doing without continuing research to help yourself farm more efficiently, says Walt Fehr, Iowa State University plant breeder.

"No industry makes any progress over the long term without considerable investment in research and development to increase efficiency," notes Fehr.

"If you look at the short term and think we've accomplished enough, that's like saying a farmer should farm with the same tractor he bought back in 1960," Fehr says. "In the same way, if the soybean industry sits static, we will lose that competitive edge of efficiency that we have gained through research."

Much of that research has been made possible because of farmer

support through the soybean checkoff. Checkoff funds are distributed through state soybean promotion boards made up of elected farmer volunteers. The Iowa Soybean Promotion Board has supported Fehr's breeding research since 1972.

"I'll agree with any farmer who believes research ought to be stopped — if in this coming year farmers don't spend any time thinking about how to improve their efficiency," Fehr says. "And that's just not going to happen."

What would happen if farmers stopped funding research?

"Let's suppose we discontinue our research in the genetic area. Will farmers be satisfied with that when some unexpected problem comes along? I don't think so," Fehr says.

"What if in the 1970s we said 'so what if some farmers in northern

Iowa have an iron chlorosis problem?' We wouldn't have a variety resistant to that problem today," Fehr explains.

How important is checkoff money to soybean research?

"Quite frankly, the research in Iowa without the checkoff would be extremely minimal," Fehr explains. "The checkoff money has really been the thing that has given us the opportunity to delve into high risk research which has no promise of success, but which — if it works — will make an important contribution."

Iron chlorosis resistant soybeans is a good example. "We had no assurance of a payoff," Fehr relates. "But here we are — a relatively short time later — looking at having germplasm available for public and private breeders to use that is more

resistant to that problem than any genotype known to exist in the world today.

"But without checkoff support, we would not have had the opportunity to undertake that kind of research," Fehr says.

Other soybean researchers are quick to agree. Says soybean breeder Dr. David Weaver of Auburn University, "If I didn't get checkoff support, my work would be severely limited. It's hard to get outside grants — from the USDA and industry for example — for breeding work because it's not considered basic research."

Edward Wisk, University of Delaware researcher, says checkoff funding allows him to do much more on certain projects than he would otherwise be able to do.

The University of Delaware

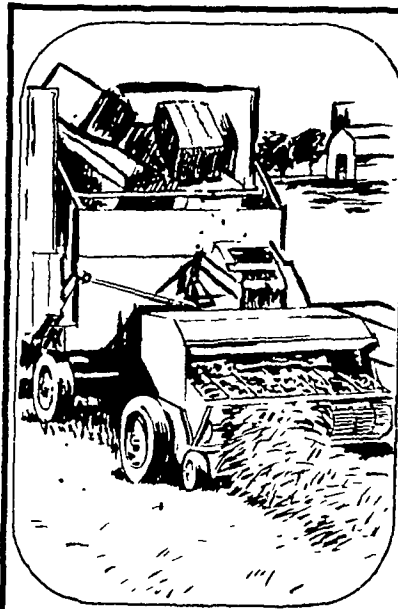
conducts soybean variety tests at four locations in the state. Says Wisk, "Our variety testing program has grown less than 10 commercial entries four years ago, to 32 entries in 1981, to 49 entries in 1982. That's more than a 50-percent increase in on year."

Why can't soybean farmers rely on private company research?

"One mission of the private sector is short term variety development," explains Fehr. "They have very specific objectives — to improve soybeans for characters of immediate importance and payoff."

"For example, I recently responded to some questions from someone in the private sector about research we are doing on soy oil quality. We are trying some high risk research to determine if

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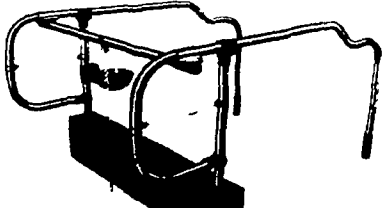
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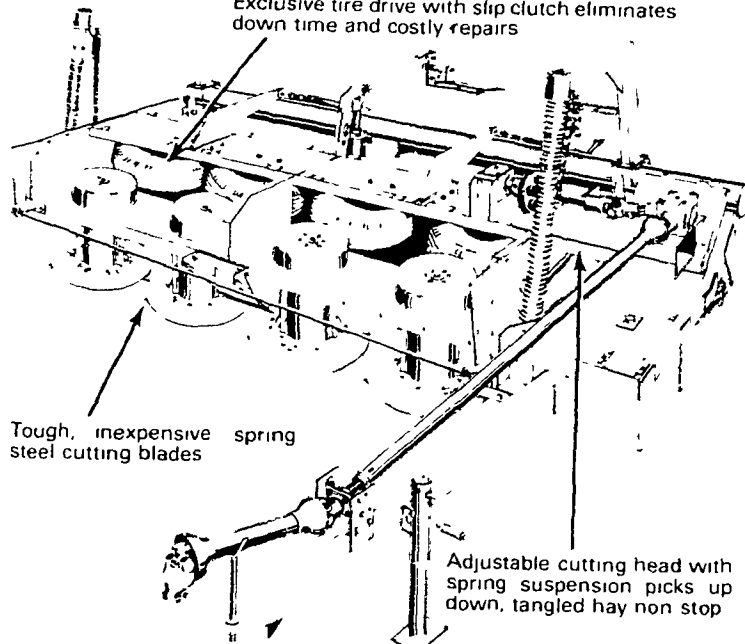
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