

## Field checks very important this year

DeKALB, II. — You can't assess crop yield prospects from the road because the "outside row" effect will fool you every time. Growers who haven't walked their fields may be surprised at harvest time, especially this year of pronounced and widespread growing stresses.

Plant breeders take advantage of stress conditions in their selection nurseries because it helps them eliminate the least useful part of their breeding

materials. One thing they are careful about, however, is to avoid comparing stress tolerance when different nutrients are involved. Growers should copy this plant breeding technique. If you try to compare stress tolerance between short-season and full-season corn or sorghum hybrids, for instance, you don't know whether you are actually comparing hybrids or just two distinct maturity groups.

In some areas, short-season

hybrids completed pollination before the worst of the heat and drought; consequently they are outperforming mid- and full-season ones. In other areas, relief came too late to benefit early crops but later maturing ones picked up and are performing best. Of course, planting dates are involved, too. The same hybrid planted on dates two weeks apart may have reacted much differently.

This leads us to emphasize the importance of managing to "plant three maturities" in order to reduce the risk of having most of a crop in one stage of growth at a given time. It is an approach that should help iron out sharp year-to-year yield fluctuations due to unpredictable stress.

Hybrid selection within each maturity takes on added importance in such a program. You are seeking the best three hybrids

for your farm, not the single best one. When harvest results are in, try listing the hybrids from lowest to highest grain moisture, then look for the best performers in each different maturity group.

There are many additional management concerns to be resolved as you conduct a field-by-field checkup. Be alert for success of weed and insect controls and assess the need for changing pesticide application timing or technique. Recognition of a soil fertility or tillage problem may lead to some adjustments to be made for the next growing season.

Finally, in your pre-harvest field examinations, be very alert to stalk quality.

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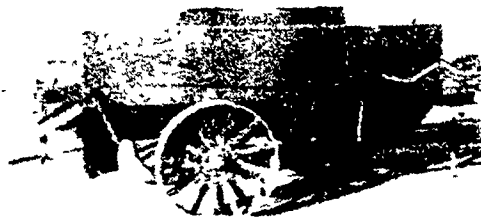
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