

Shaving costs critical in soybean production

INDIANAPOLIS, Ind. — Holding down soybean production costs has never been more important than it is this year, with market prices stuck around the \$6 mark, and with costs rising again for inputs like seed, fertilizer and chemicals. Last years farmers' costs to put soybeans in the ground increased \$4 per acre, and they are forecast to rise again slightly this year, according to Chase Econometrics.

Fortunately, there are ways to cut the biggest component of this variable cost—chemicals—which is forecast to average \$17.63 per acre in 1985, or 29 percent of the total variable cost per acre for soybeans.

This is the year to re-think crop chemical programs to take advantage of the new cost relationships. Here are some steps for cutting soybean production costs:

1. Calibrate your sprayer. This simple step could save farmers over a billion dollars this year, according to a study conducted by the University of Nebraska. The study showed that most farmers are missing their intended rate by more than 10 percent, resulting in

poor weed control, crop damage and/or wasted chemicals.

Calibrating a sprayer is a simple task, though it does require a pencil and paper and a trial run with the sprayer filled with water. Instructions on how to do it are available from most chemical dealers.

Besides calibrating, a farmer should make sure his sprayer is operating at a low pressure of 20 to 40 pounds per square inch for soil-applied chemicals.

To increase the gallonage flowing through the sprayer, larger nozzle tips should be used rather than increasing the pressure. To double the flow, the pressure must be increased by four times, making this an ineffective way to increase gallonage. This also reduces the effectiveness of the application by producing a misting spray pattern.

The best nozzle size is the largest one that will provide the desired volume. Nozzles should be clean, as should all screens, strainers and tanks. Check the accuracy of the pressure gauge, since this was one of the more important causes of inaccurate application in the

University of Nebraska study.

2. Figure chemical costs per acre, not per gallon. The cost per gallon can be misleading, since for some chemicals only small quantities are needed on each acre.

To figure cost per acre, simply divide the cost per gallon by the number of acres it covers.

3. Don't buy more weed control than you need. Match the herbicides used to the weeds that really need to be controlled. To do this, make a list of the weeds typically found in each field and compare that against the control offered by available herbicides. The lowest-cost product which controls the weeds will be your best buy, and buying any additional weed spectrum will be unnecessary expense.

One good broad-spectrum foundation herbicide may come so close to the desired weed spectrum that cultivation may be substituted for an additional chemical in combination. If a tank mix is needed, starting with a dependable preplant herbicide which controls both grasses and some broadleaf weeds can minimize the cost of an additional product.

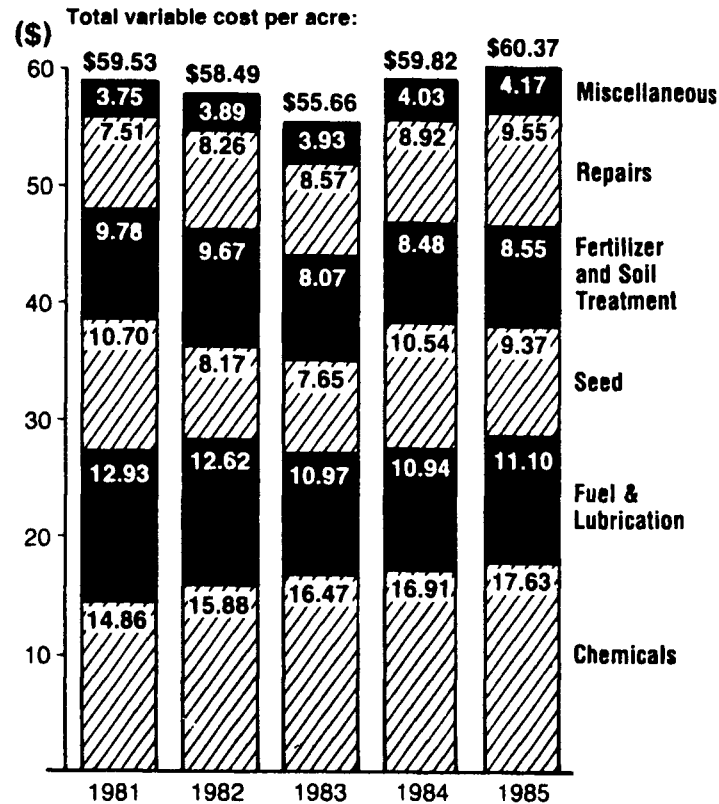
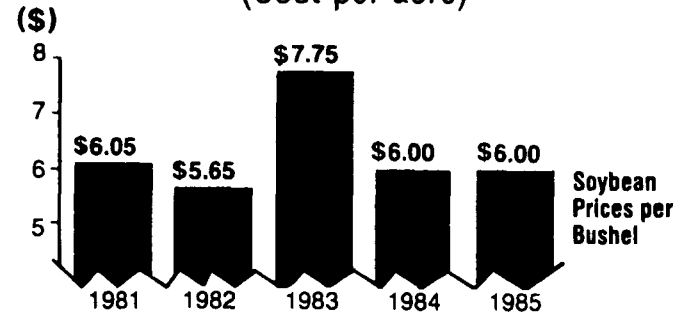
While checking the labels, make sure the rates used are proper for the soil type. Using an excessive rate was once considered cheap insurance; now it is more costly.

The secret of success in herbicide use is accuracy, not scrimping. Poor weed control can easily lose 3 bushels per acre or about \$18, which is enough to pay for the most effective, long-lasting preplant herbicide tank mix on the market.

4. Watch cash flow. Costs can seem low if cash flowing in meets the need for cash flowing out. Forecasting the need for cash is useful, and can assist in planning sales of grain or livestock, or other cash-generating activities. Sometimes purchases can be made early if cash is available, resulting in price discounts. When these

Soybean production: The costs keep rising

(Cost per acre)



Source Chase Econometrics and Elanco Market Research

Calibrating your sprayer

- 1) Measure 204 feet in your field (This distance is for a 20-inch nozzle spacing. For other spacings, see note below.)
- 2) Drive your tractor 204 feet at spraying speed and time it with a stopwatch. (Example: Let's say it takes 30 seconds to cover 204 feet.)
- 3) Park the tractor, set your sprayer at application pressure and spray water through it. Catch all the water coming from one nozzle for the amount of time it took to go 204 feet. (30 seconds in the example)
- 4) The ounces caught per nozzle equal the gallons applied per acre. (Example: If you catch 18 ounces in 30 seconds, you are spraying 18 gallons per acre.)
- 5) Mix the chemical needed per acre with the gallons of water per acre indicated. (Example: To apply two pints of Sonalan per acre, put in two pints of Sonalan for each 18 gallons of spray.)

NOTE: If nozzle spacing is not 20 inches, use the method below to figure the distance to substitute for 204 feet: $340 \div \text{nozzle spacing (in feet)} = \text{distance to substitute for 204 feet during calibration.}$

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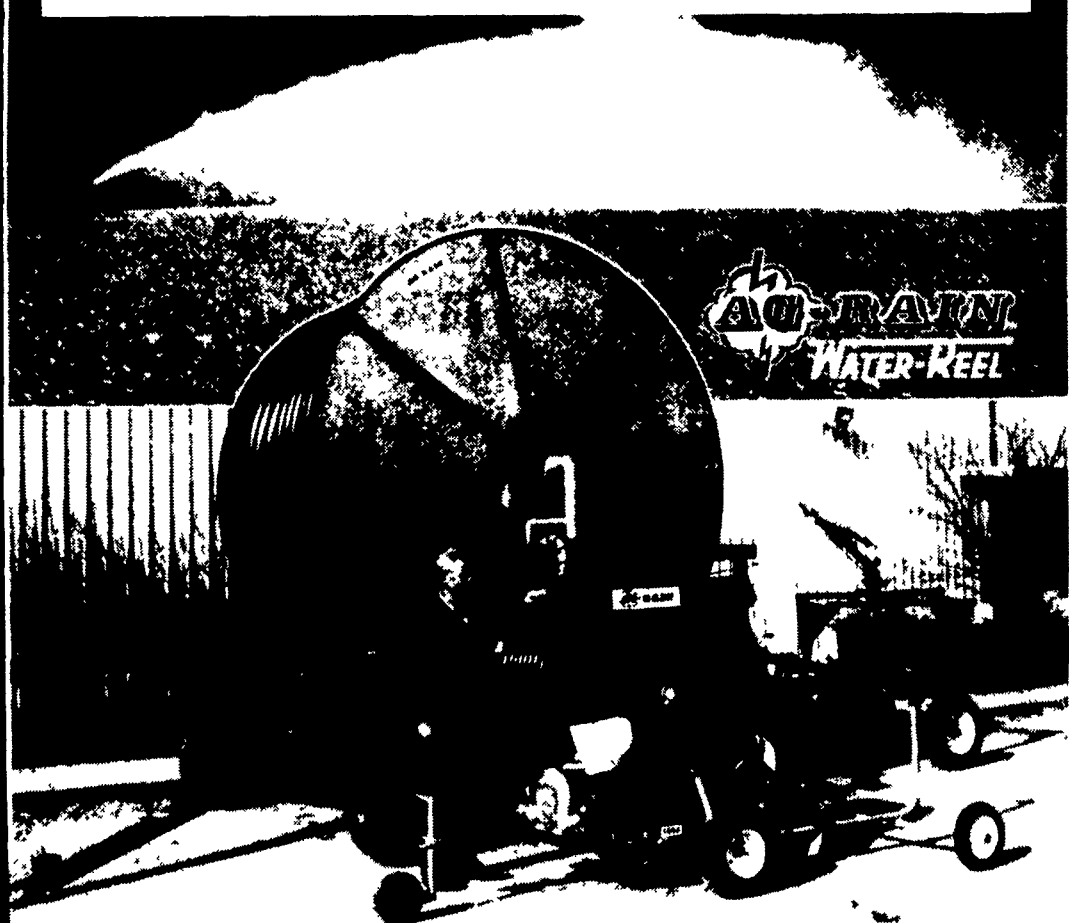


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