

HARD WORK AND HIGH-TECH IRRIGATION JUST COULD HAVE SAVED OUR SEED CROP

by Ted Doebler



Picture was taken during a better crop year, of course.

How does the Doebler seed crop look? Will Doebler be short? Will the new XP hybrids be available?

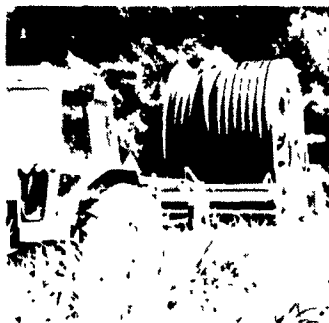
My son-in-law Willard Jones is sales manager, and he's been fielding such calls for weeks. Ever since the midwest drought started making front page news.

But Willard didn't have the answers then. He still doesn't. None of us will have much before Ag Progress Days.

I can tell you this. We began producing about 30% of Doebler's seed in the midwest after Hurricane Agnes almost put us out of business. So customers have a right to be nervous. Seed crop there is a disaster. For all seed companies.

Big local acres

Up until late June, we thought we had an ace up our sleeve at Jersey Shore — 1900 acres of hybrid seed corn along the west branch of the Susquehanna River. Then we also got hammered by drought and blistering heat.



It takes big power to move out gun cart and 4.5" hose. Right: "Water's at gun," Willard tells man at pump. Gun covers acre an hour.

In 1972, the Susquehanna covered our seed crop with three feet of water. In 1988, the same river just could have saved our crop.

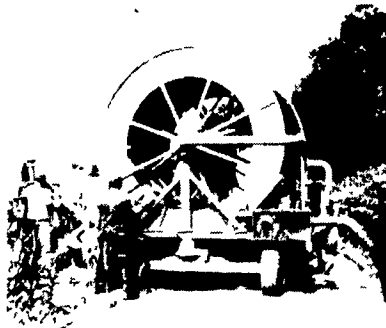
May was wet at the farm this year with 1.89 inches on May 19 alone. But then June came up 2.89 inches short. By July 1, inbreds stopped growing. Leaves curled.

Suddenly it was crunch time. Family trips and outings were cancelled for the Doeblers over the Fourth of July. Everyone moved irrigation pipe instead. Over 18,500 feet. And we started putting down water 24 hours a day.

Just in time, too. By mid-July rains were off another 1.4 inches.

Near frost to super heat

In June we worried about frost. In July the weatherman turned up the furnace.



Irrigation reel stands 14'.

Temperatures hit an official 101 at Williamsport July 6. Our thermometers read higher.

On July 7, the mercury edged over 100 again, and we cranked up a sixth irrigation system. A seventh was put on order.

Then on July 8, Jersey Shore topped 105 degrees. Humidity was 10%. It felt like 212 degrees in the field. And no letup in sight.

Willard turned to Wes McCracken, my other son-in-law, who keeps equipment humming.

"Like they say in show business," Willard grins, "don't let them see you sweat."

We learned long ago you don't make money irrigating corn. Not even seed corn. Not with pumps and people working around the clock. Not with the price of aluminum pipe doubling in three weeks and the bill for diesel fuel going out of sight. At this point, we just want to save the crop.

Our Hobbs Reel Rain units cover an acre an hour, and are about as high-tech as you can get. The crew sets up the giant reel by the river, then pulls an irrigation gun and 4½" hard rubber hose down the row

1,000 to 1,300 feet with a 125 hp tractor. The hose is kept full of water. It's heavy.

Two men with walkie-talkies coordinate water flow from pump to reel to irrigation gun. At full throttle water pressure hits 160 pounds at the reel and 92 pounds at the gun.

The irrigation gun fans water in an 180 degree arc, then swings back to repeat the coverage. A water turbine at the reel pulls the gun cart back one and a half to two feet a minute and always over dry ground.

Our commercial hybrids would thrive with such treatment, of course. But in seed production we work with inbreds that are more susceptible to drought, heat and other stress.

Let's talk at Ag Progress

Hopefully, we'll have a pretty good picture of seed supplies by Ag Progress Days August 16-17-18 at Penn State's Rock Springs Research Center. Let's talk about it then.

Those late July thunderstorms had to help. But after a dry April, wet May, dry and cool June and searing July, who's to say we won't have a late August frost. It's been that kind of year.



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WE GOT YOUR NUMBER

Let's Talk Corn At Ag Progress Days