

Between The Rows

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Erg-related sites, including many commercial firms. Access to the WWW requires a PC with a relatively fast modem (14.4 kbps) and an account with an access provider. Many computer network services such as America Online, Prodigy, and CompuServe offer Internet access. You can also use the Internet to communicate and send messages back and forth, provided you have a mail address.

Last week, someone electronically mailed a multicolored field map of organic matter variation to me.

Technology is also coming fast in the areas of sensor technology and variable rate application technology (VRT). At the American Society of Agronomy Meetings this fall, a USDA researcher reviewed research that is being done in the area of sensors mounted on farm equipment. These included crop sensors to measure chlorophyll, moisture, yield and populations, soil sensors to monitor moisture, organic matter, and nitrate, pest sensors to monitor weed populations and ID, and equipment sensors to measure flow rates, ground speed, and draft force. Many of these are under commercialization already.

Variable rate seed, fertilizer and pesticide application equipment is already available. At the National Corn Growers Corn Classic last year, I visited with vendors who were selling planter attachments that would vary seed drop depending on

input from a previously generated field map. One challenge to this technology is understanding what the critical factors are to measure to use as a basis for the rate adjustment. Agronomists are finding this is not as clear-cut as they once thought.

Another challenge is cost. One vendor told me a VRT fertilizer spreader system could cost a dealership \$250,000. To recover that kind of investment, that piece of equipment needs to be providing some type of tangible benefit.

In addition to all of these innovations, we have a spectrum of new crop input products that look exciting. These include Bt corn, herbicide resistant corns, a new N fertilizer additive, and several new herbicides and two new granular insecticides.

In addition, nearly every farm magazine this winter has had an article on narrow row corn, a topic we've been researching for several years.

Unfortunately, space does not allow me to cover all of these innovations but several of them I consider real breakthroughs.

We know that all of these technologies may not find their place to production systems here in our state, but our challenge is to carefully consider some of them and select the most effective pieces.

Let's do our homework well and make the right decisions on this new technology and avoid the costly learn-by-experience method.



CORN TALK NEWS

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Growers Pick Responsive Ears

ST. LOUIS, Mo.—If Bill Northey had stuck to his plan, the National Corn Growers Association (NCGA) would have a different president this year.

Northey, 36, grew up on a farm in an area with deep family roots. His father and grandparents farmed. They sowed the seeds for a third generation, but until his junior year of college Northey had other career goals.

"I always knew I wanted to go into agriculture, but not necessarily farming," the Iowa native said. "In college I thought I'd go into farm management. Then my grandpa mentioned the possibility of coming back. It made sense."

The transition worked for both. Northey could join an established operation. His grandfather could pass on his life's work.

Northey, his wife, Cindy, a part-time nurse, and their three daughters farm 800 acres near Spirit Lake in north central Iowa. They live in the home his grandparents built in 1950.

"It was a good chance for me. For the next six to seven years he was around," Northey said. "I got to spend time with him and learn some of his philosophy."

Fortunately for the NCGA, influence came from both sides

of the family. Northey's maternal grandfather was a past president of the Iowa Farm Bureau.

"Grandpa Hill gave me the interest in history and understanding of agriculture—how big it is, how important it is, and that things don't just happen," Northey said. "You could see the impact individuals and organizations had."

History is important to Northey. Not only does he find it fascinating—his favorite books tend to be biographies or accounts of agriculture's past—but he also finds it useful in coping with today's issues.

Natural curiosity also works for Northey. When he first got involved with the Iowa Corn Growers Association, he delved into environmental issues. That led to ethanol, an on-going battle that requires in-depth understanding of highly technical issues and history.

"I really believe things are at a changing point for growers," Northey said. "We are making change with farm policy, and then we have corn genetics that will challenge us with more corn production and probably contracting in corn that's focused toward end uses."

Growers, Northey said, must look at these developments and figure out how they impact farming operations. The association must determine how to help farmers cope with the technology.

One area where NCGA can assist is helping farmers grasp the new computer-based concept hitting farms. Global Positioning Systems, for example, will be commonplace in just a few years, Northey predicted.

"I think we're on the front edge of a lot of that, and 10 years from now there will be some real substantive changes," he said. "We can't

just sit back and see what happens to us and our association."

Sitting back is something you won't see Northey doing, at least in the near term. His personal goal as president is to take time to hear everyone's opinions. If time spent on the phone is any indication, he's meeting that goal. During harvest, Northey drove his combine down the rows, left hand on the wheel and right hand holding a cellular phone.

During his first months in office Northey traveled to Washington, D.C. several times. The budget reconciliation was looming, and the opposition was waging a war against the ethanol. A patient wife and devoted part-time employee kept the wheels turning at home.

Northey thrives on this type of action. But he misses spending more time with his wife and girls. His girls, though, like having a father in the limelight. When the Des Moines Register published an article featuring him and National Corn Development Foundation President Everett Nordine recently, all three had to have their own copy.

For the next year, Northey must sacrifice some of that precious family time for the NCGA. In the end, he doubts he'll have any more impact on the organization than most. But as president, that's not his job.

"The goal isn't to leave your fingerprints all over the association, but to make sure it's doing what corn growers want done," he said. "Certainly as president you have some opportunity to make your own impact, but in certain ways you are more limited. Your role is to facilitate what needs to be done and to a spokesperson for the organization, not for yourself."

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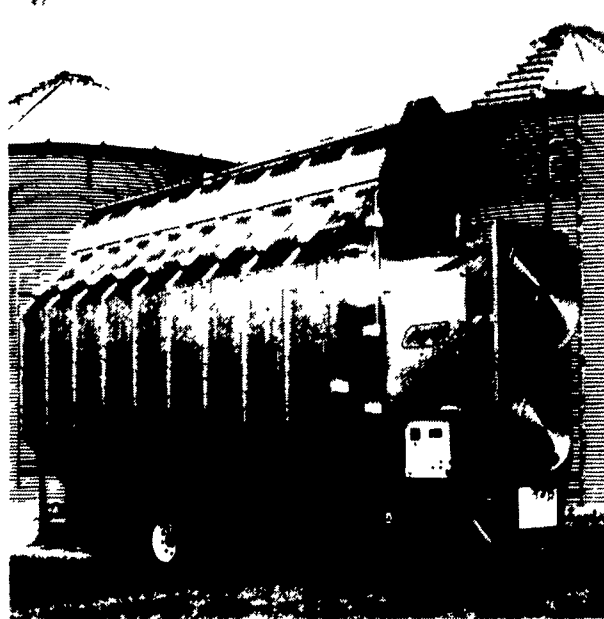
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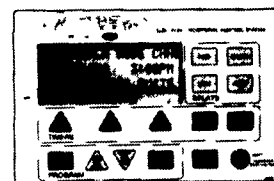


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