

Technology Proves Promising To Growers

Editor's note: The following is reprinted from the Conservation Impact, October 1994, published by the Conservation Technology Information Center (CTIC).

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There's no doubt that this new wave of technology is exciting to those of us who want something better for the farmer, but it's also apparent

there are details to be considered.

Variable Rate Technology

For instance, variable rate technology (VRT) involves matching the rate of a pesticide, nutrient, or seed delivery to the specific needs of a given site in the field. The basic idea is that, once the system is in place, the equipment will automatically deliver the precise or "more precise" amount of any input needed during a pass through

the field.

The grower can choose from several systems to make this possible: both satellite-related (global positioning systems) and non-satellite systems. Most seem to involve grid-based soil sampling and/or monitors attached to equipment. Only the grower can decide if the expense is a worthy investment.

That could be a tough call at a time when much of the technology is still evolving and standards are still to be determined.



CORN TALK NEWS

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Yield Monitors

Yield monitors seem to be the rage for those interested in gathering some information fast. The monitors, mounted on combines, can be set to gather data second-by-second during harvest. The yield data is collected on a high-volume computer disc and entered into computer programs that put it in map form.

One producer recently showed me his three-dimensional yield map and explained how the variation helped him determine problems with his tile drainage system that were hurting yields in part of a field. He noted that, just to look at the field, he would have never known there was a problem.

I hope the increases he expects in yield are great enough that the lateral lines he ran to remedy the problem will pay off.

Items To Ponder

Researchers at Purdue have

been doing some limited on-farm research into variable rate technology. Here's some bits and piece of their findings:

- Not all the variability found in soil tests and important for crop management.

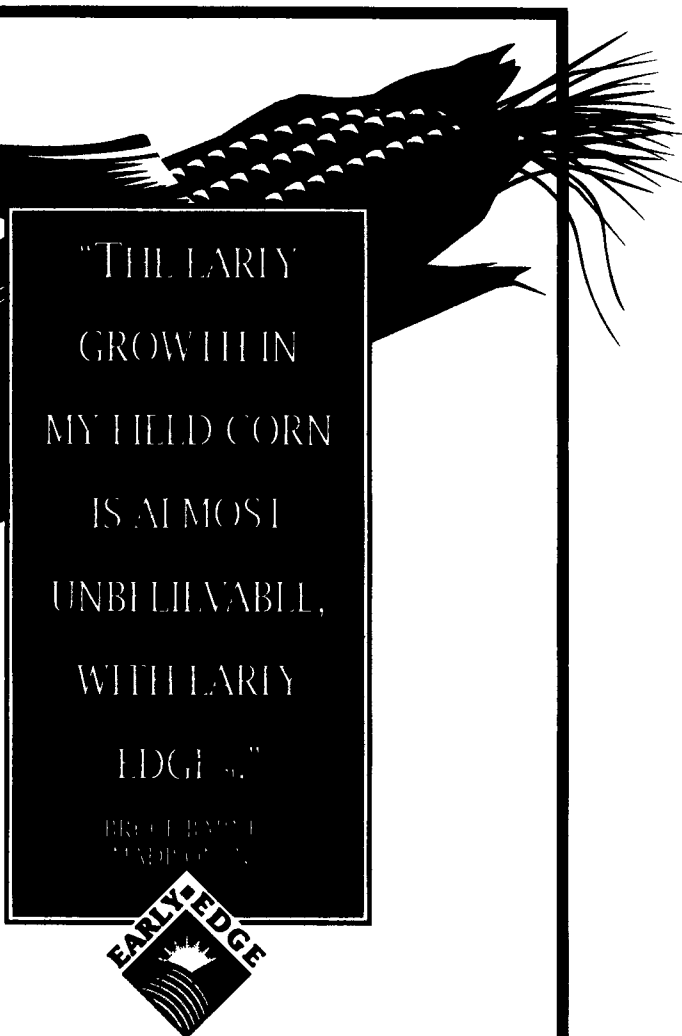
- Mapping techniques used to guide inputs can vary substantially.

- Yield data monitors can do a good job measuring average yield but performance at a specific point seems more variable.

- Don't expect yield increases on fields already well managed on a whole-field basis. The benefit comes in reduced input use. A key question is if savings cover the costs of VRT applications.

- Most equipment and software purchased now will be obsolete in two years, but those who use the current technology will be best poised to profit from the next wave.

- Enrolling one or two fields with an input supplier who offers variable rate technologies may be worthwhile as a learning experience, even if it is not currently profitable.



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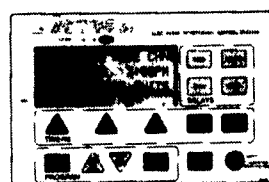
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