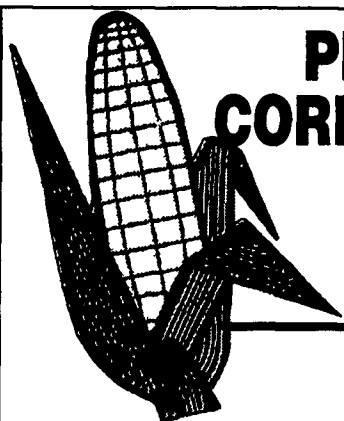


# PENNSYLVANIA MASTER CORN GROWERS ASSOCIATION



## Between The Rows

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Penn State Agronomy Associate Professor



(Continued from Page 1)

many other university trials. On the other hand, some of the best yielding hybrids in our trials contain the Bt gene, so you can't generalize that Bt hybrids are not cost effective.

In my book, each hybrid needs to be evaluated independently. The bottom line is to look for hybrids with a consistent track record and then consider price. Gradually introduce new hybrids into your lineup and try to get some variation in maturity as a hedge against drought stress.

Tillage is an input that probably gets overused. I know many corn producers are not satisfied with the performance of no-till corn. With careful attention to compaction, weed control, and crop rotation, though, yields of no-till corn can be similar or better than tilled corn, with less expense. If you're not convinced, then try some no-till on selected fields following sod or soy-

beans. Studies have shown increased yields and success of no-till under these conditions.

Nitrogen (N) is an input that often gets targeted for cutbacks because it is a large out-of-pocket cost. Often, though, on nonmanured ground, we see large yield responses to N. Cutting back to 100 pounds per acre where you need 150 might result in a 10-bushel yield loss. So you save \$7.50 on N and lose \$25 per acre in yield. Shoot for 1.1 pounds of N per bushel of your yield goal and then adjust for your manure and previous crop credits. Cut back on those fields where its justified.

P and K inputs could be cut back in some cases—if you have a soil test. Generally soils in the optimum to high range for P and K have a low likelihood of showing a yield response. We are mostly fertilizing these to maintain soil test levels. In our trials, it is often difficult to show yield responses under these condi-

tions, unlike the situation we see with N or hybrid treatments where we often see large differences. Corn still can respond to starter fertilizers at high soil test levels, however. Starters are probably not justified when soils reach the excessive level for P (350 pound P205 per acre) unless you're planting very early under cool soil conditions.

Weed control is another area where cutbacks can be made but this is risky and requires good management. Weed control failures result in lower yields. We know that where you have had excellent weed control for several years, the soil weed seedbank may be reduced and you may be able to get by with lower rates or lower cost programs. Some of our large growers use this type of strategy—but it requires good management. Part of the trick of getting by with lower cost weed control programs is to work hard to use rotations, tillage, or sanitation (keeping problem

weeds from spreading) to keep weed populations down. This strategy is most effective if you have the ability to followup, if necessary, with a low-cost, postemergent program or cultivation. If weeds took over after last year's drought-stunted corn, then your weed seedbank has probably just got a new replenishment and you may not be a great candidate for weed control cutbacks.

Insecticide inputs are another one to consider. Some growers continue to use corn rootworm row insecticides on all their acres. We just don't see a benefit on corn following soybeans or sod and I've been on lots of good farms where they don't see a need, either. We have not seen the corn rootworm problem yet in rotated crops like they have in the Midwest. So if you're in this category, this is another potential cutback. Given the rootworm populations in some corn fields last year, I'd be hesitant about following corn this year without some rootworm control. For folks who spent a few

bucks an acre scouting last year for rootworm beetles and know their counts are low, here's a place to save \$10 to \$15 per acre.

There are also lots of low-cost management details you want to be sure to include in your program to get the most out of this year's crop. Make sure that planter is tuned up and ready to work properly, monitor seed depth, plant early, and check each field for problems 2-3 weeks after planting and then again at 4-6 weeks.

Yes, there is potential to cut back in some areas of corn production, but it is not easy. It requires some knowledge and some management information. If you have soil test and scouting data, you'll be ahead of the game. If you need help making these decisions, seek out a professional crop adviser who can help you decide on the best combination of inputs for your situation. If you decide to cut back in some way, by all means, do it carefully and intelligently.



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