



PERSPECTIVES

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF CROP QUEST AGRONOMIC SERVICES, INC.

Real Ag Data Subscription



by **Dwight Koops**,
Regional Vice President
Ulysses, Kan.

Crop Quest would like to introduce our customers to REAL AG DATA, if you have not already been exposed to it. For the past two years, Crop Quest has been improving our pooled data delivery system utilizing our SST Information Lab.

We have been delivering Real Time information on a weekly basis pertaining to crop condition, growth stage and pest infestations, via e-mail. This information has proven to be very valuable to those interested in current trends out in the field.

During the 2005 crop year, we are going to offer the

REAL AG DATA (RAD) subscription to our Crop Service customers as part of our service. Soon, we will be delivering this subscription via the Internet. This will give customers more convenient access to the data. If you would be interested in perusing the information, or keeping up with trends in your neck of the woods, you can contact Nathan Woydziak at nwoydz@cropquest.com. You can also contact your agronomist and provide your e-mail address, so we can give you instructions on how to access the information as the 2005 crop season begins.

Crop Quest is constantly trying to find ways to add value to our services. We believe this will be a very valuable addition. If you have any questions, please contact your Crop Quest representative.



Hybrid/Variety Choices and Technology



by **Ron O'Hanlon**, President
Member, National Alliance of Independent
Crop Consultants, CPCC-I Certified

Each year as harvest winds down, thoughts soon turn to what hybrid/variety choices farmers will plant for the next cropping season. The decision becomes even more difficult with the biotechnology traits that have been introduced into the plants, and determining if they are worth the premium that is charged.

Seed selection is one of the most critical factors in making a crop management plan. If the wrong seed is placed on the wrong field, it is difficult to make up for the loss that can occur, even if everything else is done right. Planting the wrong hybrid/variety can have a serious negative effect on yield. It is important for a farmer and his agronomist to take the time to study the varieties to at least lessen the risk in making those seed choices. Seed selection is certainly not a defined science where a person actually knows what hybrid/variety should be planted on which field, soil type, moisture condition and the many other variables associated with farming. But it does become an art in knowing what plant characteristics do better for the management conditions and soil types a certain farmer may have. Much of this is based on the past experiences of the varieties that have previously been planted. It also comes from a knowledgeable agronomist who has studied the research and the genetics of the various hybrids/varieties, and has had experience working with many other seed choices with their other clients.

According to researchers from Purdue University, just with the genetics difference alone, corn has shown an 1.5 bushels per acre per year increase since 1930, whereas soybeans have only gained 0.4 bushel per acre per year. This means

a farmer who is planting a corn hybrid that is just five years out is giving up 7.5 bushels per acre for not staying relatively current on seed choices. This shows the importance of keeping informed on both the performance and the genetics of the new hybrids/varieties coming on the market.

The introduction of genetically modified traits such as Bt corn for corn borers and rootworms, Roundup Ready corn and soybeans, and Liberty Link corn has increased the importance of making the proper choices for seed selections. All of these biotechnology traits come with an increase in cost. It may be in the form of a biotechnology fee associated with the seed cost or with an increase in the use of a specific herbicide. Most of the traits are extremely effective, but the cost difference has to be weighed against the probability of yield loss from the possible presence of the pest the trait is supposed to control. A farmer also has to take into account a possible loss from what is known as yield lag or yield drag. This just means the technology has not advanced far enough to be positioned in the "elite" hybrids/varieties currently on the market or the combination of the biotechnology with the plant's genetics is resulting in some yield loss.

As the number of seed companies continues to shrink due to mergers and acquisitions, there will be greater pressure on farmers for their purchasing decisions. We have seen an increase in pressure over the past few years from seed companies wanting farmers to make their decisions almost before harvest season is over. They insist the farmers will have a better chance of getting the right hybrids/varieties and the proper seed sizes with their early decisions.

Seed selection is one of the first and most critical decisions made for the next cropping season. Be sure to take the necessary time in making that decision, along with your Crop Quest agronomist.



QA



by Jim Gleason,
Regional Vice President
St. John, Kan.

Q What are some of the potential changes I can implement on my farm with these higher diesel fuel prices?

A With diesel fuel prices nearly double from a year ago, most producers are scrutinizing their operations for different ways to manage. In some cases, moving towards no-till or strip-till may be the way to go. For others, the answer may be to figure out a way to combine operations to eliminate a tillage trip. There are a lot of disk-rippers and finishing tools on the market that may fit well into your operation.

Another possible way may come from utilizing herbicides even more for weed control. With the lower price of glyphosate and other products on the market, this can be a very cost-effective way to kill weeds in place of tillage.

There will be a lot of time spent this winter trying to figure out what direction is the best way to go. Every farm operation is unique and there is no single way to tackle this. You may want to visit with your Crop Quest agronomist about what will fit your situation.



Get Updated!

CQ Perspectives is updated online every other month. To be notified when Web updates are posted, send an e-mail to rohanlon@cropquest.com with "subscribe" in the subject line.

GPS-Guided Auto-Steer Systems Paying For Themselves

Seldom in modern agriculture does new technology live up to its hype. But one certain exception is the breakthrough technology of GPS-guided auto-steer systems.

There are various steering assistant systems and software that connect to your tractor's hydraulic power steering system and automatically steers the tractor for perfectly straight rows. Simply engage the "autopilot," and you can drive straight rows all day – ensuring minimum overlaps and having more time for infield applications such as listing, planting, spraying and cultivating. Because it is completely automated, GPS-guided systems can work hour after hour, with the same consistent, high-accuracy performance.

It didn't take Copeland, Kan., farmer and Crop Quest customer Travis Jantz long to review and adapt the new technology.

"In order to reduce erosion, compaction issues and chemical costs in our operation, we decided to change our style of farming to strip-till a few years ago," Jantz explains. "This requires applying a small band of nitrogen in one pass in the fall and leaving the rest of the field undisturbed. It is almost a no-till environment. Then we go back in the spring and plant directly in that exact band."

"Auto tracking our fall strips allows us to have precise planting coordinates," Jantz adds. "We're using the same wheel tracks with the sprayer as well, thus reducing compaction throughout the fields."

And when Jantz started planting cotton a few years ago, he knew the high input crop would also require precision application to keep expensive chemical costs to a minimum. "Our sprayer booms are 90-ft. wide and, with this system, we're able to precisely place each spray nozzle over the row. The only way we could be this accurate is with the GPS-guided auto-steer technology."

For Jeff Hamilton, Ensign, Kan., purchasing the auto-steer system was a major cost advantage. "We just purchased a new air seeder and we didn't have to buy the expensive markers (\$5,000 savings) for it because



we were using the auto-steer system," explains Hamilton. "The seeder is 42 ft. and markers are pretty expensive to put on it. Now we don't worry about tearing up or maintaining the markers."

Hamilton, who farms with his brother, James, says that chemical savings have been a major benefit with the auto-steer technology.

"We are broadcasting all our chemicals with a 90-ft. boom sprayer," he states. "Before we purchased our auto-steer system, we'd often overlap by as much as 6 ft. to 8 ft. in places. When we do that over several thousand acres, we could quickly see how much additional chemicals we were wasting. Now there's no overlap at all. The chemical savings alone pays for the system."

Hamilton says there is a cost associated with the new technology, but he adds, "It's extremely functional. We can take it out of one tractor and put it in the sprayer or put it in the combine to do field mapping. It works across a wide variety of platforms and only requires removing the mobile processor from one tractor and plugging it into another to have full auto-steer capability. I wouldn't buy another tractor that didn't have this capability."

In conclusion, Travis Jantz adds, "This new technology takes the guesswork out of farming. It allows me to set up very straight and permanent wheel tracks for subsequent field work, extend hours of operation without conventional markers, reduces overlap which saves time and input costs, all while reducing driver fatigue and driver errors. I'm sold on it and would never farm without it."



2004 Crop Year a Good One For Crop Quest Growers

Decreasing grain prices and increasing fuel costs tempered what was otherwise an outstanding year for Crop Quest growers from Texas to Nebraska.

With most of the corn harvested by press time, most irrigated corn is topping 200 bushels per acre and many dryland growers produced over 100 bushels per acre.

Soybean yields were likewise high, and prices continued to fall during the growing season. Late season rains and cool weather created some problems with lodging and late-occurring sudden death syndrome, but yields were near record levels throughout most of the region.

Cotton generally suffered from a lack of heat units caused by cooler than normal temperatures and above-average rainfall during the growing season. Despite these conditions, new varieties and improved pest control will allow most farmers to top the two-bale per acre mark.

SOYBEANS

“This is one of the biggest soybean crops we’ve ever had in the northeast Kansas area,” notes Crop Quest consultant Scott Beguelin. “We had several growers going over 60 bushels per acre and most of the others were in the 50 to 60 bushel per acre range,” he said.

The only downside of this year’s crop, he points out, was some late season rain that caused lodging problems in some fields. “Lodging may have cost some growers four to five bushels per acre, but late maturing benefited from the rain, so it may all average out,” Beguelin says.

The other downside of the 2004 soybean crop was continually declining prices. Growers that sold early and had big yields really did well and those who waited to book their beans lost some of the advantage of the big yields that we saw this year, he notes.

“Escalating fuel costs are a big concern for our growers, and I believe when we do farm plans for next year, it will be a primary reason that soybean acreage will go down some,” the Crop Quest consultant says.

CORN

Corn yields were consistently good across the region. Though few growers had outstanding yields, even fewer had

poor yields. “Corn was a very consistent crop in our region,” notes Crop Quest consultant Farrell Allison. “We have a few growers topping 220 bushels per acre and some dryland farmers topping 100 bushels per acre,” he says.

Allison adds, “We gave a new meaning to the term ‘scattered showers’ in western Kansas. I have one grower who had 2 in. of rain in one field, and on the other side of the farm, another field that got only a trace.” Despite the hit-and-miss nature of rainfall, growers in western Kansas used only about a third as much irrigation water as in the drought-plagued 2003 season.

Water, but more precisely the cost of water, is still the most critical issue faced by corn producers throughout the region. Allison points out that, despite his growers getting about 8 in. of rain in 2004 compared to 1 in. in 2003, and subsequently using about a third as much irrigation water, the fuel costs for pumping the water were about the same for both years.

Across the region, Crop Quest consultants agree that corn acreage will increase slightly or at least remain at current levels. A big concern is that soybean acreage will be driven down by commodity price, resulting in a weaker rotation program for corn. If that happens, nematode-related production problems are likely to follow.

Insect and disease pests were not a major factor in corn production across the region. There were some sporadic outbreaks of southern leaf rust and grey leaf spot, but nothing to cause significant yield loss, says Allison.

“We are keeping an eye on these and other potential pest problems for corn, but the big challenge next year will be to put together a farm program that will allow growers to address the higher cost of water without negatively affecting yield and quality of their crop,” Allison concludes.

COTTON

Growing cotton in west Texas and Kansas is a high-risk, high-reward gamble for producers. Hopefully, high yields will offset the “bite” of low quality.

In the Texas Panhandle, Crop Quest consultant Kyle Aljoe says yields look good. “We have to make two bales per acre just to break even and, in terms of

yield, we should do much better than that,” according to Aljoe. “Some of our farmers have a good shot at topping three bales per acre,” he notes.

Low micronaire scores will be a problem on irrigated cotton and, to a lesser degree, on dryland cotton. “From the Panhandle of Texas on up into Kansas, it has just been too cool and too wet to grow high-quality cotton,” Aljoe says.

Despite the cool, wet growing season, verticillium wilt and other disease problems often associated with cool, damp weather, did not materialize in 2004. Likewise, insects were only a sporadic problem. “We didn’t have to spray for bollworms in our Bollguard cotton,” Aljoe notes.

Despite the expected quality problems in west Texas, growers are generally optimistic, according to Aljoe. Three consecutive years of good yields and decent prices are convincing growers that they can grow cotton in higher elevations of the High Plains, according to the Crop Quest consultant.

Further north in southwest Kansas, Crop Quest consultant Rob Benyshek notes that cotton production took a significant hit from a late season freeze. Combined with a slow maturing crop because of the cool, wet weather, many Kansas growers will likely reevaluate whether to continue growing cotton. “I think cotton will be around in this area, but we will have to take a closer look at next year’s farm plan to see how it will fit in,” he notes.

MILO

For most growers, milo is a secondary crop, but its low production cost and fairly stable price may result in an increase in acreage in 2005.

“We had a fairly carefree year with our milo,” notes Benyshek. Greenbugs and headworms are frequently a problem, but 2004 was a very light year for insect pressure he says.

The big battle with milo in Kansas was weeds. In many areas, dry conditions at planting, and subsequent delay in germination caused many of the pre-emergence herbicides to lose control. Combined with plenty of rain early in the growing season, the lack of herbicide activity created plenty of weed problems for our farmers, Benyshek adds.

Real Ag Data Patronage



by **Nathan Woydziak**
Precision Ag Specialist

Five years ago, Crop Quest began collecting digital data on fields across the High Plains. Clients may remember this transition to digital data as the day they began to receive a computer-printed report. During that same time period, clients should have been presented with options as to how they would prefer their data be used. We say their data because Crop Quest views the digital data as owned by the client. Only the client may grant permission to allow the collected data to be ANONOMOUSLY pooled.

The vast majority of those having signed the consent agreement have selected the "Publish Option." This option simply allows Crop Quest to anonymously combine one client's data with other client's data into a pooled database. These pooled datasets have proven valuable to clients, industry and

agronomists. A couple of examples would be examining how row orientation affects yield across the entire Crop Quest trade area. Another would be taking a closer look at how well specific tank mixes are working on a given pest across tens of thousands of acres. For more details about the data pooling program, you can visit www.realagdata.com.

When a client signs the "Publish Option," Crop Quest agrees to return a portion of that benefit to the producers. We're pleased to announce that time has arrived. Thanks to the support from our clients, industry and universities, we are now able to send out a Real Ag Data patronage. This patronage will show up on the November statements as a credit to their account. The amount for the 2004 crop year is relatively small per patron, but we expect that patronage to grow over time.

A total of 746 clients were initially eligible to receive the Real Ag Data patronage. If you're a Crop Quest client and haven't yet signed a consent agreement or would like to change to the "Publish Option," please feel free to visit with your agronomists. Thanks for the support. We'll continue to work hard to make this program a success for our clients and for Crop Quest.



Ag is a Lifetime Interest for New Crop Quest Consultant



Growing up in northern California, Kyle Hagerty became fascinated with agriculture at an early age.

"I'm not really sure where my interest in agriculture came from," Hagerty says. "Even at an early age, I had an interest in both the production and business sides of agriculture."

After initially pursuing a degree in agricultural business, Hagerty found his niche in range management and agronomy. He earned a degree from the University of Wyoming in mid-May and

began his career with Crop Quest two days later.

While at the University of Wyoming, he interned the summer of 2002 with Panhandle Cooperative in Scottsbluff, Neb., and in the summer of 2003 with Crop Quest in eastern Kansas.

"Those two experiences really opened my eyes to the need that growers have for information," Hagerty says.

"Incorporating data on pests, soil fertility, water management and various other production costs was so important to the growers I worked with during both internships."

In May 2004, Hagerty began his

career with Crop Quest, working with Front Range Manager, Kent Davis, in Johnstown, Colo. In his first crop season with Crop Quest, Hagerty spent much of his time working with sugar beets, barley and corn.

"In working with one of our newest growers, I found some soil fertility information that saved him some money. After I showed him the results, the grower said, 'Wow, I wish I had been working with your company longer,'" Hagerty says. "That's the greatest feeling in the world knowing you helped somebody like that," Hagerty concludes.



Mission Statement

Crop Quest is an employee-owned company dedicated to providing the highest quality agricultural services for each customer. The quest of our network of professionals is to practice integrity and innovation to ensure our services are economically and environmentally sound.

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