

Persistence Pays

(Editor's Note: This story highlights the comments made by David Hula at the recent Pioneer field days.)

BETTY VALLE GEGG-NAEGER

MidAmerica Farmer Grower

Part 2 of 3

Never quit! That is the mantra of David Hula of Charles City, Va. He didn't quit when he broke through the yield ceiling in the National Corn Growers Association yield contest in 2003 with a 321.8 bushel per acre yield. He went on to log a 385 bushel yield in 2007, then topped that with a 429.02 top yield in 2011.

Hula, who farms with his father and two younger brothers at Renwood Farms in Eastern Virginia, was the keynote speaker at Pioneer field days in New Madrid, Mo., on July 30, and in Union City, Tenn., on July 31.

"In 2013 we just came off some really challenging times," he began. Following the drought of 2012, this year began with floods in May and June, but with the triple effort of replanting some corn three times and the persistence of fighting weeds, the fields finally flourished with a good stand. One challenge was getting the fertilizer out on time.

"We were not putting on more fertilizer but we were spoon feeding it," he recalled. "We did use some fungicide, and we're trying new chemistry, some Kixor, some plant growth hormones, just some new technology, some new fertilizer blends, some new additives. We have a fair crop, not our best crop ever because we'll have a lot of zeros out there. It caused us to do a little bit more management this year. We'll have some good yields but it will pull the crop down a little bit."

He's expecting some tremendous yields in the dryland crop and awaits some pretty good yields in from the irrigated land. Sunlight was scant this year because of all the rain, and that took its toll on the crop.

"We've had some struggles, I think we will be shelling corn in December," Hula predicted. "We just focus on plant health, and keep the crop growing, just like you keep your wife happy."

He's quick to admit this close knit farm family has been blessed. His father is 72 and mostly retired. One brother has been with the farm for 25 years, and another just joined the family business three years ago. In 1987, his father started a continuous no-till program, something that he and his brothers of the third generation now refer to as "never till." That practice has spread throughout the east coast as people began to realize the savings it provides.

"We're also in the seed business. We raise corn, soybeans, and cereals – wheat, barley and oats. That helps us diversify," he explained.

"Another unique thing is we've been part of the agrotainment industry," Hula added. "Part of my dad's retirement is he likes to collect farm equipment. We have a farm museum, a farm maze and petting zoo, so we can inform people of what's going on in the ag world."

The Hulas have had pretty good success with corn yields, as well as soybeans and winter wheat yields.

"We take great pride in the really good quality of the seeds we plant. In reference to corn, we've had a lot of success with Pioneer genetics. We've taken that to heart, when we open a bag of seed we try to protect the integrity of the seed, get whatever we can to maximize the yield from that seed," he said.

Virginia mostly has a sandy loam soil, so he monitors the nutrients closely. In the eastern part of the United States there is the Chesapeake Bay program

where efforts are made to curb soil runoff.

"We're really focused on environmental stewardship; we try to minimize leaching from soil erosion. That's why we've gone into this never till system," Hula said.

He reports a lot of good luck in 2012, the family's best year ever. They recorded 52 bushels per acre on soybeans and while that's not a huge number, when you consider every one of those beans were double cropped, it is.



"We averaged 181 bushels on corn across the board," he said. "Some of that was on rice sandy soil, so if we get 100 bushel, we feel that's an accomplishment. However, we like to pencil in 300 bushel on irrigated corn."

Last year Hula's son posted a yield of 308 bushels per acre on NCGA dryland corn. Hula himself had an irrigated entry of 384 bushels.

"That was with the Pioneer genetics. We take great pride in that," he said.

"We follow a lot of nutrient management programs, we intensively apply nutrients, we spoon feed the crops," Hula added. "The important thing is we have to make sure it's economical. We do throw the book at some things to see if they're economically feasible. Some say, 'How can you justify all those inputs?' We do pencil them in and they are cost effective. That gives us an idea of what we should be looking at in our program."

His one recommendation to other farmers is to try not to get too comfortable with the same program year after year.

"Think outside the box, try something new," he said. "If you do the same things over and over, you will get the same results."

In his travels in the midwest, he finds farmers get comfortable if they make a 220-250 bushel crop. If the prices are good, that is pretty good.

"But if we want to be more economical and feed more of the world we have to step our yields up, we have to try something new.

"If it doesn't work, don't quit," he cautioned. "Just try something else the next year." Δ

BETTY VALLE GEGG-NAEGER: Senior Staff Writer, MidAmerica Farmer Grower

Editor's Note: If you missed David's presentations at the Pioneer Field Days: Put January 15 & 16, 2014 on your calendar. David is scheduled to present a breakout session on January 15 and facilitate a roundtable session on the January 16, at the 17th Annual National Conservation Systems Cotton & Rice Conference and Southern Corn & Soybean Conference, Tunica, Mississippi. Watch for future details at www.mafg.net.

syngenta®

Link Directly To: **SYNGENTA**