

# Precision Water Control

## Hybrids, Varieties Are Another Key Effort In Boosting Yields

(Final Part Of A Four-Part Series On Triple G Farms of Arlington, Ky., Operated By Darren Grogan, His Father, Bobby, And Younger Brother, Brian.)

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### ARLINGTON, KY.

The bottom line of the crop production operation at Triple G Farms is a top yield. All of the efforts on this farm complement one another to increase yields. Along with tiling and irrigation, another of those efforts is choosing the right varieties.

A dedicated Pioneer customer, Grogan switched this year from a Pioneer-DeKalb mix

36,000 seeds per acre for two reasons. If it got dry it wouldn't have made any yield, and not much of it would be standing when harvest time came."

Darren said a lot has changed in varieties, and he attributes that to Pioneer and their agronomists working closely together.

"I was able to look at every individual hybrid and every piece of population data they had on each hybrid to find the sweet spot and match that with our land," he said. "I believe, along



**Darren Grogan stands in front of the grain bins the family installed. The bins are capable of holding 900,000 bushel of grain all in one location. Marketing from these bins is a collective effort with everyone participating.**

Photo by John LaRose Jr.

to 100 percent Pioneer. Darren is a believer in staggering the maturity on corn, planting a 113-day maturity up to a 119-day. The 5,800 acres they plant in corn can be planted in a 10-day period, weather permitting.

"Obviously our planting dates aren't staggered and that is another benefit of tiling these bottoms: We are able to plant these tiled bottoms by April 15 when before we would not have thought about planting them yet," he said.

Previously it would have been May 15 before they would consider planting the bottoms.

"Now we roll right off the hills and plant in the bottoms," Darren said. "So we're seeing a lot of that benefit from the tile in earlier planting dates."

With staggering the maturities, the pollination dates are also staggered, spreading the risk out if there's a dry spell during a critical time.

With soybeans, it's much the same story.

"We're exclusively Pioneer on the soybeans as well," Darren said. "I'm very much excited about the Y Series soybeans. The technology in them looks good and I'm very pleased with the performance of the past varieties we've been using. We've got a great relationship with our Pioneer team from the sales manager to the area agronomist. The area agronomist, Jonathan Fant and I work together very closely. He is in tune with our fields and he keeps me in tune with their varieties so when we plant we are able to effectively match the best variety possible with the given soil types in the field."

Darren plants corn on 30-inch rows, and drills soybeans primarily on 7.5-inch rows, with a minimal amount of soybeans on 15-inch rows.

"We have not seen data to support narrower corn to this point," he added. "I am looking closely at twin-row corn, and I'll do some testing on that this year."

Their seeding rates have increased considerably the past few years. He said the higher seeding rates also contribute to higher yields.

"In the early years back in 1996, we probably averaged on our hillier ground in the 25,000 seed range on corn," he said. "Now the minimum on population for us is 30,000 seeds per acre. That's on our lowest yield potential. We're going up to 36,000 based on two population test plots, one for DeKalb and one for Pioneer last year."

Darren explained the tests went all the way from 30,000 seeds per acre to 42,000 seeds.

"When we shelled that, the 42,000 did yield more than all the others, but along in the 34,000 to 38,000 range seemed to be the sweet spot," he said. "Beyond that, seed costs, increased risk of lodging, several other factors make me think we shouldn't go beyond that 36,000 at this time in our area."

"However, that is changing, and one thing I would encourage is that farmers educate themselves on varieties as fast as they're changing," Darin added. "We're seeing standability in hybrids that we have never seen before. We could not have planted hybrids 10 years ago at

with tiling and irrigation, that has been the leading factor in the increase in our yields over the years of targeting the population to our environment."

They use Lumax by Syngenta as a pre-plant on 100 percent of the Roundup-Ready corn acres, and come back with another Lumax and Steadfast, a DuPont product, treatment about three weeks after planting.

"Then we also use a considerable amount of Warrior on our corn, soybean and wheat acres for insect control," Darren added. "We use Quilt fungicide on all our irrigated, highest yielding corn acres, and we're seeing a good yield bump from Quilt fungicide on corn. I do like Syngenta products on our farm. We get very good support from them. Their products work very well and we haven't had a chemical claim in 10 years."

Triple G uses variable rate lime application, but uses a flat rate on fertilizer.

"The reason is I haven't seen a benefit on variable rate fertilizer," Darren said. "Typically, our fertilizers stay pretty uniform across the field, so it hasn't been a necessary thing to do. However, since we're farming a lot of ground with three or four farms put together and different management practices on each over the past 20 years, there's a variability in our lime and pH levels across those acres. You do see some fertility variances, but not dramatically. We have the capability to do variable rate fertilizer, our own truck is set up for it, but we have not done that at this time."

Again, the liming, fertilization and herbicide applications are done in house with two 100-foot wide spray rigs. Corn is planted with two 24-row, 30-inch John Deere planters that are 60-foot wide. If they get behind they use another 16-row, 40-foot wide planter as a backup. With just the two big planters, they can cover as much as 600 acres in a day.

All in all, it is the yield increase that tells the story. From the time they began farming in the early 1990s, the corn yields were bumped up from 130 to 135 bushels to the acre to a three-year average of 166 bushels today. The 40 bushel soybean yield jumped up to 55 to 60 bushels on double-crop beans and 58 to 60 bushels on full-season beans. The early years on wheat they would shoot for 50-bushel wheat. All of this is with the acreage scattered within a 35-mile radius north to south.

While they're doing a great job now, the Grogans have goals they are forever striving to achieve.

"The goal is to do better next year than we did this year, and put practices in place that are going to allow us to have more yield potential than we had the year prior," Darren said. "We need to gain knowledge of seed varieties as fast as the seed companies are progressing, and move at as fast a rate as possible in our management practices to make it all come together."  $\Delta$

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