Yield Boosters

The Little Things Make A Big Difference In Bushels

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DELTA, MO.

"Pay attention to details and scout daily." That's the advice of Jerry Cox, National Corn Yield Contest winner from Delta, Mo. Jerry and son, Matthew Cox, have won 21 National Corn Yield Contests over the years and all but two have been since 2001.

"Our yields over the last three or four years averaged about 220 bushels per acre," he explained. "We really worked on fine tuning our fertility program with soil testing and tissue testing to see what's going on. Nitrogen is one big thing; we try not to put all of our nitrogen on at one time, we like to split apply our nitrogen."

Jerry's dad purchased the farm southwest of Delta, Mo., in 1962, so it's been in the family for almost 50 years. Altogether, the Cox family farms about 2,000 acres, most of which they own, although some is rented.

The farm is run by Jerry, son Matthew and a hired hand today, but years ago Jerry's father, a couple of brothers and two hired hands as well as Jerry made up the work force.

"I started entering the National Corn Growers Yield Contest back in the early 1980s and didn't have a whole lot of success then," Jerry said. "We could win in the state competition. We entered several different classes – irrigated, non-irrigated, ridge till, no-till, conventional. We farm a little bit of every way possible. All of our land is flat and since we're not in the rolling ground, we can plant conventional if it's necessary. A lot just depends on the year and the type of yield we have as to how we do it."
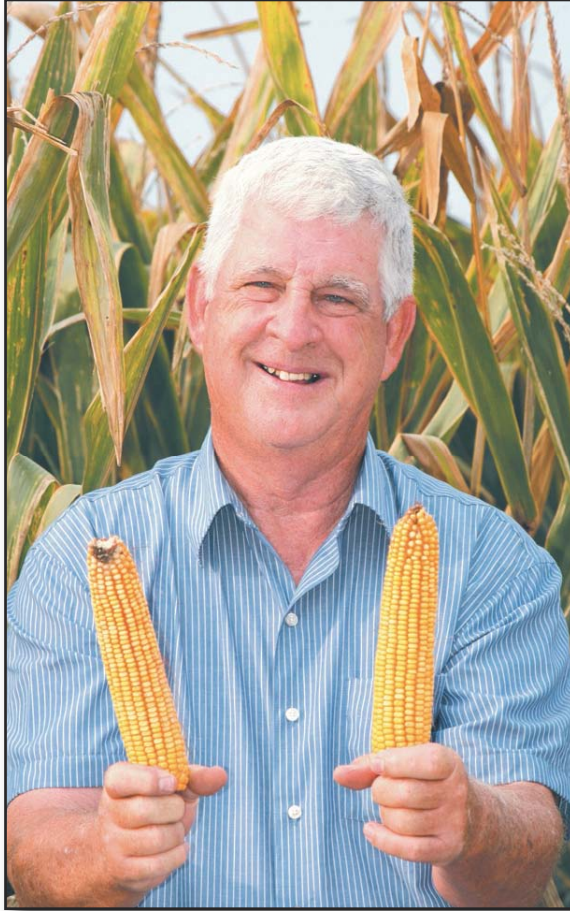
"Then we started looking at doing some different things with starter fertilizer and foliar feeding," Cox said. "We really had a lot of success, my son and I, in the National Corn Yield Contest in 2001; and actually 2003 was really our breakout year. We had four national wins that year in four different classes. Our yields had gone up to about 280/290 bushels to the acre in our yield contest and we kept trying to find ways to improve. Then in 2007 we finally broke the 300 bushel mark. We had a 321 bushel yield in 2007 which has been our highest. We repeated that in 2009, but that has been the highest we've ever done. So total, my son, Matthew, and I have won 21 National Corn Yield Contests over the years and all but two of them have been since 2001."

Cox said to continue to grow it's important to stay on top of the latest that's out, the newest technology.

"It's not always better, but you have to look at it and choose those things that work for your operation," he said. "There's a lot out there now as far as fertility. We're learning a lot about micronutrients and when you need to use them; I think you just have to stay on top of it. Of course, the information age now with the internet, we do learn a lot quicker and information just gets out there a lot faster."

For those who wish to copy Cox's success on yields, Jerry has one message: Pay attention to details.

"To me, the day you put the seed in the ground is the most important day of the whole year," he continued. "If you don't get that done right then you're not really set up for success, you're more likely to have   failure. Sometimes Mother Nature can be kind and she can make things better for you, but that's the most important day. Pay attention to detail all the way through."

He explained that 10 years ago he didn't do any tissue testing, just soil testing and he proceeded according to that.

"Then I found out that just because I applied what the soil test said, it wasn't always getting into the plant," he said. "So I think farmers need to do more of that and know what's going on out there. Just pay attention and get out there and look at your crops. I think farmers are a lot better at that now. I don't hire scouts to look at my fields, I do most of it myself, but somebody really needs to be out there more than once a week. They need to be out there every day really." Δ

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