

PRAIRIE FARMER[®]



MONEY MAKER: Purchasing the Meter Max stand and updating his planter helped his bottom line, says Brent Wening.

The stakes get higher for a planter tune-up

By TOM J. BECHMAN

HARVESTING good yields comes from paying attention to little details," says Brent Wening, Jasper. One of those little details is better stands.

Wening's antennae went up when he learned that every thousand ears, or roughly 1,000 plants, bumps yield 6 to 8 bushels per acre. He did a little ciphering: 6 more bushels per thousand plants x \$2 bushel corn (winter 2004-05) = \$12 more per extra thousand plants.

If he fell 3,000 plants per acre short due to stand establishment issues: \$12 less

Key Points

- Experts say 1,000 extra ears are worth 6 bushels an acre.
- At \$2-per-bushel corn, that means \$12 extra per acre.
- At \$3.50 corn, more plants on 1,000 acres is \$35,000 more.

per extra thousand plants x 3 (thousand) = \$36 less per acre.

Plug in your own math. For 500 acres, that's \$18,000; for 1,000 acres, it's \$36,000; and for 2,500 acres, it's \$90,000.

Wening purchased a Meter Max stand from Precision Planting, Tremont, Ill., and learned how to check row units. As a seed dealer, he runs

units for customers; however, his primary purpose was improving his stand.

Meter Max stands typically cost \$7,000 to \$8,000. Wening's model allows him to test either finger-pickup or vacuum units. He can set various air pressures on vacuum units, and he can also test different varieties at different populations and planting speeds.

"I adjust units until I get a single kernel in every cell," he says.

"I already knew the planter was the most important piece of equipment we owned," Wening says. He believes that now more than ever.

As it turns out, a drive

shaft on his planter was bent just enough to cause a jerking motion and affect seed drop. He invested money in his planter last season: checking and adjusting each unit, updating worn parts on the planter and adding Keeton Seed Firmers.

Wening believes he's already paid for the repairs in one season, due to better performance.

Higher stakes

If you still aren't convinced that it's worth paying to test each planter unit and cover repairs, then rethink the decision using potentially higher corn prices.

Suppose you gain 3,000 plants per acre, properly spaced. At \$3 per bushel corn, that's now \$54 per acre extra gross income, not \$36.

Over 500 acres, that's an extra \$27,000 you could pick up; it's \$54,000 over 1,000 acres; and it's a whopping \$135,000 on 2,500 acres.

Suppose you think you're already doing a good job. Running units on a test stand and going over the planter is a good way to find out, Wening believes.

Say you determine you might gain an extra 1,000 plants through better stand establishment. At \$3 per bushel, that's \$18 per acre, \$9,000 on 500 acres, \$18,000 on 1,000 acres and \$45,000 on 2,500 acres.

Finally, suppose you're also a good marketer. If you lock in \$3.50-per-bushel corn, now harvesting 1,000 more plants next fall means \$21 more per acre. Harvesting 2,000 extra ears per acre is worth \$42. And 3,000 more ears would be worth \$63. On 1,000 acres, bumping the stand by only 1,000 plants at \$3.50-per-bushel corn could be worth \$21,000.

Is it time to pull the planter into your shop and get started?