dg-precision pics Troy McKown, Matt Bennett

Take advantage of winter shop time to calibrate planter

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FarmWeek

Farmers busy buying seed and securing inputs for the upcoming planting season shouldn’t forget one of the most important factors for successfully starting a crop – the planter.

Often found in a corner of the shed with little attention this time of year, representatives of Precision Planting recommend farmers start calibrating planters in the weeks ahead so they’re ready to hit the ground running this spring.

Precision Planting’s Troy McKown, region manager lead, and Matt Bennett, regional sales manager, provided tips to maximize planter effectiveness and avoid pitfalls at Precision Planting’s annual winter conference in Tremont last week.

“Our goal is to put seed in the ground and produce a plant that produces the fruit we want to harvest,” McKown said. “There’s a couple ways you can lose that (including spacing errors and emergence issues). You have to make sure your planter can drop a seed like you want it to.”

Farmers should start planter preparation by testing the meters annually, McKown said.

Seed spacing issues come down to maintenance and mechanical controls while crop emergence largely depends on proper mechanics and management choices.

“A reason we’re talking about this is the economy. The number of acres per row is starting to creep up as trade cycles change a bit,” McKown said. “As planters get a little age on them, there’s things you need to pay attention to.”

Farmers should make sure the planter bar is level and ensure it provides proper downforce. They should also make sure there’s no gaps in the gauge wheels.

“Wear is OK (on the gauge wheels),” McKown said. “But there’s going to be variation. You need to find the variation and adjust.”

Farmers can reduce variation with their planters and other issues by measuring and making sure all components are aligned and calibrated. Metrics worth measuring include singulation (spacing), population, the row unit ride, gauge wheel weights, closing system weights, furrow moisture and residue, Bennett noted.

“You spend a lot of time and money on this stuff,” he told farmers. “You need to get it right.”

Bennett noted the cost to run a 16-row planter, including seed and inputs, averages about $3,096 per hour. So, the cost of not properly calibrating a planter before the season continues to escalate.

“As farmers get bigger and the (planting) window tightens, they have less time to stop and adjust the planter during the season,” Bennett said.

Farmers who want a professional assessment of their planter should contact their dealer or a Precision Planting representative. END