

FORAGER



Agronomics with livestock in mind!



CORN HYBRID SELECTION ~

Corn hybrid selection is not always easy and seed catalogs can be confusing. All the hybrids that are available, compounded with the variety of traits and seed treatments, create a scenario for many options. After paging through a seed catalog, how do you select a hybrid without making a guess or flipping a coin? And how do you select several hybrids that will complement your entire planting (and nutrition) program?

It is important to keep things simple and remember these three points:

- ◆ **Ask questions**
- ◆ **Genetics first**
- ◆ **Traits second**

When selecting corn hybrids, the most important service you can provide is to ask a lot of questions and get your customer involved with the selection. Identify the characteristics and expectations the producer has, and you might even consider approaching each field separately. Some typical questions may include:

1. What is the end use of your corn (corn silage, shelled grain or high moisture)?
2. What is your typical or average yield goal?
3. How many bushels/acre do you fertilize for?
4. Besides yield, what is the next most important characteristic you want in your corn crop?
5. What are the limiting factors to growing a good crop?
 - a. Corn genetics are capable of producing 400(+) bushels/acre and 35(+) ton/acre ~ so what's keeping the genetics from maximizing the potential?
 - b. Limiting factors may include drought conditions, excessive soil moisture, heavy soils, light soils, insects, diseases, etc.
6. What plant population works best for you?
7. What is your harvest time frame/window?

Desirable characteristics for each farm will depend on the situations and expectations unique to that farm. Once you've discovered what a producer wants, it will be easier to determine what group of hybrids will provide the genetic characteristics that best match the farm's needs in order to maximize the potential for both the farm and the hybrid(s).

Next, based on the answers regarding the farm/field performance expectations, it is important to determine what genetic characteristics will best meet the farm's

goals. Here are some of the characteristics you should be looking for:

- Yield ~ offensive/defensive; racehorse/workhorse; or dependable/top-end risk
- Emergence/Vigor ~ germination fast/slow; ability to get out the ground
- Stalk quality ~ staygreen; greensnap; disease tolerance/resistance
- Insects ~ corn borer; cutworm; rootworm; armyworm; grubs; wireworms; seed corn maggots; etc.
- Disease tolerance ~ gray leaf spot; northern leaf spot; etc.
- Drydown ~ fast to black layer; slow stalk drydown; or an equal stover-to-grain ratio
- Heat tolerance ~ ability to yield well under drought stress
- Root strength ~ best on marginal soils vs. high fertility soils
- Digestibility ~ milk/ton vs. milk/acre (BMR vs. non-BMR)
- Harvest window ~ relates to hybrid relative maturity and/or planting time spread
- Crop rotation ~ corn-on-corn; corn-on-sod; corn-on-soybeans; etc.

Once you have determined the genetic characteristics that best fit the needs of the farm, you can choose the corn hybrid families that match that farm. With the selection of the genetic family, you can now pick hybrids that have a desirable trait feature. Remember, it's much easier to match the hybrid to the farm versus forcing the farm to match the hybrid. It is probably a good idea to select more than one hybrid (possibly 3 to 4), depending on how many acres are going to be planted. This will spread out the risk of crop failure if unforeseen events happen, such as severe drought, damaging winds, prolonged standing water, etc. Don't put all your "eggs" or all your producer's "eggs" in one basket!

In summary, understanding the farming operation's needs and goals, selecting the hybrid genetic families to match those needs, and choosing a trait within the hybrid genetic families will increase the odds of the producer growing the best crop possible.

(edited from an article by MYCOGEN SEEDS, October 2005)

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