

Feature Story



Record-breaking yield strategies

Growers across the nation are always pushing themselves to gain higher yields, not only to highlight their success, but to also highlight the industry as a whole. Every year, the National Corn Yield Contest, sponsored by the National Corn Growers Association (NCGA), challenges growers across the nation to compete for recognition as a Record-Breaking Grower.

According to NCGA, records were shattered in 2016 as our nation's corn growers hit an all-time production high of 15.1 billion bushels. This included a record national average yield of 174.6 bushels per acre. These yield numbers indicate that growers are paying attention to yield-raising strategies and applying them to their fields.

What are some simple strategies that these record-breaking growers are using? NCGA contest winner, Heath Cutrell, offered a look into his 2016 growing season.

Cutrell's farming operation is located in Chesapeake, Virginia, where he primarily grows corn, soybeans and wheat. The season started out bumpy when his fields were hit by hurricanes Hermine and Matthew.

"It was pretty bad, it flattened a lot of my corn," said Cutrell. "But I was actually able to get it all up with a little time and came away with a good crop."

Cutrell explained that one of the reasons his yields broke records was because the corn got everything it needed, when it needed it.

"It seemed like every week or so, we were getting rain, which is what corn wants," said Cutrell. "We had a lot of good heat and I think that's what got the corn to where it needed to be."

Rain and heat are ideal conditions for diseases to develop. Luckily for his corn, Cutrell is a true believer in fungicides.

"I use Headline AMP® fungicide every year and a few other different products along with it. I'm a pretty firm believer in, 'don't fix something that ain't broke.' I stay right with what has worked for me in the past."

While Cutrell likes to rely on strategies that have worked for him in the past, he still embraces change and is not afraid to try something new. Last year, he decided to top dress the corn earlier than he typically would and put down a few more pounds of fertilizer.

"When it comes to farming, everything's changing constantly," said Cutrell. "Nothing stays the same from year to year. Trying different things is something that helps me push my yields to new heights."

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As for this growing season, Cutrell is looking to break his own record and come away with another NCGA win. So far, he has planted an additional 1,000 acres of corn and he is prepared to deal with any challenges that may come his way.