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Wintertime is a Good Time — to Plan Your Planting!

By Doug Alderman, CCA-ON

One of the most important components of planning for the planting season starts with your planter! There are several types of planters on the market today, from plate planters to finger-type seed metering systems to air planters each with a different means of metering and delivering the seed. Each system requires maintenance of one form or another to ensure seed is delivered properly.

The following is a general maintenance checklist to follow:

- Check tire pressures – it is important that all tires have equal pressure according to recommended manufacturer specifications.
- Ensure planter is level – this is very important in order to maintain the desired planting depth. (For corn, regardless of the soil type and soil moisture, the ideal seed depth is 1 1/2 to 2 1/2 inches.) If the planter is not level, it is very difficult to attain the desired planting depth, as well as correct placement of planter-applied starter fertilizers. Remember to level the planter with the tractor which you will be using to plant! Many farmers will change tractors from the previous year or change tires/sizes, all of which requires planter hitch-height adjustments.

- For finger-type seed metering systems, check for component wear, such as fingers, brushes, spring tensions, and ensuring proper tolerances are met according to manufacturer specifications.
- For air-delivery systems, check for air line leaks, pumps, etc. to ensure air pressures can reach desired levels under a wide range of conditions. Seed size, seed weight, etc. may have a bearing on the amount of air pressure required to deliver seed to desired populations. For example, new seed treatments may require more air.
- Check to ensure all drive chains are at the correct tension. Excessive wear, stiff chains, and improper alignments can all have an adverse effect on seed drop.
- Check plate wear, seed disc openers, etc. and replace where necessary.
- Check monitor wires, fuses and components to ensure everything is in working order.

If you didn't have a chance to do this maintenance on your planter before you put it away and plan to do it either this winter or in the early spring, don't wait until the last minute! I know, this is easier said than done. But when the weather warms up, and it's the 21st of April – you may want to plant corn instead of just getting the planter out of the barn for the first time!

Delaying planter maintenance can cost valuable planting time and ultimately yield potential. Instead, look at the first decent day in March to get the planter out and begin to work on it, or better yet get it into the shop this winter. Either way, make sure it is ready to go when the time is right!

Wintertime is also a good time to plan your seed requirements, finding the varieties that best suit your individual fields.

Remember – buy your seed based on sound agronomics – not just on price. Plan your planting on a field by field basis based on the most likely fields to plant first according to soil type, etc. Ask your seed dealer about their replant policies to reduce your risk. Plan fertilizer requirements by reviewing your soil tests - ask your local Certified Crop Adviser for their help. Plan herbicide requirements field by field especially if you know the field's history and the weeds you may be contending with. Get a game plan together and be ready when the soil is. Have everything, including your inputs, ready to go by the first week in April. We only seem to get a few ideal days to plant, and the ability to be ready to go when Mother Nature is will determine your ultimate yield and profit, so it pays to be on top of your game.

An early start often begins a few months before you actually go to the field! Have a "productive" winter!

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