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Hybrid Selection & Picking a Winning Team

by Jason Van Maanen, CCA-ON

Well it is that time of year again. The season is starting and if you are like me, you are going through the numbers, reading the magazines, reviewing past performance and figuring out win/loss percentages. Yes, that's right! It is time to pick the hockey pool. What we forget is that while the hockey pool could win you bragging rights and enough money to buy a lunch, proper hybrid selection is something that could mean the difference between profit and loss next season.

In recent years, to take advantage of early discounts and to get the right hybrid, placing that order has to happen sooner rather than later. So what do you do if you do not have all your yield data, the performance trials are not out and all you have is a sales rep's advice or a flashy ad in the local farm paper?

It all comes down to one word - Consistency

Your choice should be based on meaningful yield data from well-designed performance trials. Except for the new hybrids, yield data from previous years is your best way to identify consistent performers. To get the biggest bang from yield data results, look for trials that evaluate hybrids over multiple locations and multiple years. I know what you are thinking, "But they are different temperatures, different soils and different weather than me and next year will be completely different than last year". Exactly right. Weather variability is the most influential factor affecting yield because weather interacts with most other yield factors. Therefore, a hybrid that does well across many others farms over multiple years shows it can adapt to many different factors, especially weather, and will most likely perform well on your farm.

Interpreting the numbers is important

Many trials already have the statistics done for you but if they do not, there are a few easy things you can do. On farm yield data combined with hybrid/variety tracking at planting allows you to turn your entire farm into a side by side comparison, looking at specific fields, hybrids or soil types. If this is not available, you can use some simple numbers. First, look for hybrids that are 5% above the average plot yield. For example, if the average yield is 175bu/ac, look for varieties with a yield of 184bu/ac or better (175×1.05). Secondly, look at hybrids that consistently yield within 90% of the top yielding hybrid of the plot. If the highest yielding hybrid is 230bu/ac, look for varieties that yield 207bu/ac or greater (230×0.90). These two numbers indicate a hybrid that has good and consistent yields.

Remember, in choosing a soybean, wheat or corn hybrid, the key in finding that consistent performer is finding a hybrid that does well against a range of competitors, not just in head to head trials. Once you have a short list, filter them down to factors that fit your operation. For example, no-till adaptability, feed quality or insect resistance.

Balance the team

Mix up the grinders and workhorses with the goal scorers and racehorses; the young up-and-comers with the veterans. Put the new hot hybrids on your farm team (i.e. your own field trials). Bring them up and have a look, but don't sign them to the big contract just yet. Make sure your team knows and follows the rules of the game (e.g. refuge hybrids) and remember it is a long and variable season and your second or third lines might have to carry the team.

Just like picking a hockey pool, doing your research and knowing the players are the keys to having a successful team out in the field.



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