

End-of-Season Planter Care

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Uniform seed drop is an important contributor towards the achievement of optimum corn grain yield. Planter maintenance and adjustments are the primary factors that influence the uniformity of seed drop. Given the nightmarishly delayed 2002 planting season, many farmers may simply want to park their planters and forget about them until next winter.

Bear in mind, however, that planter maintenance for 2003 begins after the finish of the 2002 planting season. Here are a few pointers to consider. Consult your planter operations manual and equipment dealer for more details.

- Take the time to jot down notes on any planter operation problems that occurred during this planting season so that you won't forget about them later. If you are really ambitious, spend time during the next month to work on correcting those problems while they are fresh in your mind. If you can't find the time now to actually work on the planter, file your notes away in a safe place where you can easily find them next winter.
- Clean out all the seed from the planter seed hoppers and metering units. Seed left in the planter attracts rodents. Seed left in the units may also rot and eventually "gum up" the metering units.
- While you cleaning out the seed from the metering units, take the time to actually open them up and clean out as much of the "caked on" seed treatment as possible.
- With vacuum planters, remove the seed discs to avoid constant pressure on the rubber seals that can lead to eventual failure. Hang the discs on a wall in the shop or down in the basement. Don't stack them on the workbench or shelf because of the risk of warping. Store the discs where temperatures will not drop below freezing next winter.
- With vacuum or other air planters, open up the air ductwork and tubes and blow out all the dirt and crap that accumulated during planting.
- Remove the various drive chains on the planter, clean all the dirt and grime from them, and lubricate them well before putting them back on the planter. Some folks go so far as to store the drive chains in a bucket of oil during the off-season.

While you have them off, inspect them for worn chain links or rollers and replace as necessary.

- Clean all of this year's mud and crud off the coulters, disc openers, press wheels, depth gauge wheels, and fertilizer openers. Apply rust preventer to the coulters and disc openers.
- Clean off all the other dirt, grease, and grime from the rest of the planter. Relubricate all bearings as appropriate.
- While you are doing all of these housekeeping items, inspect the planter for broken or misadjusted parts or controls that will eventually need to be replaced or repaired. Add these items to the "to-do" list you began earlier.
- The final, and most important, thing you can do is to store the planter inside a building or other sheltered area to protect it from the weather for the ten months or so before you use it again.

Useful References

Nielsen, RL (Bob). 1994. Planting Speed Effects on Stand Establishment and Grain Yield of Corn (AGRY-94-02) [Online]. Purdue Univ. Agronomy Dept., W. Lafayette, IN. http://www.agry.purdue.edu/ext/pubs/AGRY-94-02_v2.pdf (verified 6/1/02)

Nielsen, RL (Bob). 2001. Stand Establishment Variability in Corn (AGRY-91-01) [Online]. Purdue Univ. Agronomy Dept., W. Lafayette, IN. http://www.agry.purdue.edu/ext/pubs/AGRY-91-01_v5.PDF (verified 6/1/02)

Nielsen, RL (Bob). 2002. Corn Planter Tuneups: Why Bother? (A Microsoft™ Powerpoint™ presentation) [Online]. Purdue Univ. Agronomy Dept., W. Lafayette, IN. <http://www.agry.purdue.edu/ext/ppt/PSV-2002.ppt> (verified 6/1/02)

Don't forget, this and other timely information about corn can be viewed at the Chat 'n Chew Café on the World Wide Web at <http://www.kingcorn.org/cafe> . For other information about corn, take a look at the Corn Growers' Guidebook on the World Wide Web at <http://www.kingcorn.org/>