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Firm uses fields to tell tillage tale



By WILLIE VOGT



NEW concepts in farm equipment can be management changers for many operations. That's what Orthman Mfg. has discovered about the strip-till market. This equipment maker is taking action to enhance the potential of the technology for farmers and has opened its own Tillage Research Station at its Lexington, Neb., headquarters.

Consider it a confluence of ideas.

Strip till is gaining in popularity thanks in part to more precise autoguidance that makes hitting that same row year after year a lot easier.

Key Points

- Orthman turns to research farm to test strip-till potential.
- Multiple partners have signed on to do testing at the facility.
- Research results are being shared with growers online.

Justin Troutd, Orthman's vice president of sales and marketing, comes from the seed-industry-field-research-is-a-key-part-of-the-marketing-and-success-equation school of thought.

Bill Orthman, founder of the company, had land available near the plant that could be used for the research effort.

A host of partners were available to sign on and work on a variety of tests.

Add it all together and the company has a first-year research effort with a lot going on.

"Strip till touches all inputs that a farmer puts in the ground," says Troutd. "We wanted to lock arms with input companies and start this research together."

The list of companies working with Orthman on the Tillage Research Station is long (see list). Troutd says these partners are working together to see how they can each enhance the others' products. He has a history in the seed business, working with the Wilson Hybrid line that was later merged into the Channel Bio business.

Short-line equipment companies are often long on innovation and private studies, but their names aren't the first to pop up when in-field research facilities come to mind. Troutd explains that the message from Orthman has always been one of providing farmers informa-



UNLOCKING SECRETS: Orthman Mfg. is pushing the envelope for strip-till information with its new Tillage Research Station, with plans to do a lot more advanced research in 2008 and beyond.

tion about the equipment and how it can perform on the farm. "This [strip-till technology] is not just another tillage tool," Troutd adds. "It can improve the performance of other inputs, including fertilizer, seed and even fuel use."

The aim of the plots is also to provide a non-biased source of information concerning the technology in actual field conditions. The research facility includes tillage comparison plots replicated to enhance information gathered.

Mycogen Seeds and the Channel Bio Group are taking part in those plots with all varieties offering Roundup Ready technology. Many are triple-stack corn hybrids, too.

Plots are in 12- to 30-inch-wide rows and are 500 feet long, with each replicated three times under full irrigation. Two 112- to 114-day-maturity corn hybrids from each of the partnering companies were planted at a population of 32,000 seeds per acre.

The facility will conduct root studies, check yield for each replication and compare twin-row vs. single-row corn on strip-tilled ground at three planting populations.

And the company isn't stopping with just one year. For 2008, Orthman expects to add at least two more partners and will incorporate soybean plantings into the mix. Learn more at www.precisiontillage.com.

Plot partners

- THE following companies are currently partners with Orthman Mfg. in the Tillage Research Station.
- Cropland Seeds
 - Garst Seeds
 - Hoegemeyer Seeds
 - Golden Plains Ag Network
 - Case IH - Fairbanks
 - International Monosem Twin Row Planters
 - Channel Bio Group (NC+, Crows, Midwest Seeds)
 - Trimble
 - AutoFarm
 - Agri-Inject (variable-rate fertilizer)
 - JD Stiles (variable-rate seeding)
 - All Points Co-op
 - Mycogen Seeds
 - Dekalb
 - Dyna-Gro
 - LG Seeds
 - Asgrow

Company says goodbye to bias ply

TRENDS in farm equipment are often focused on the iron, the electronics and controls of the machine. However, every major piece of farm equipment runs on tires, and there are changes under way there as well. Recently, Michelin announced a change in its offering under the BFGoodrich line: The line will no longer offer bias ply tires.

"While 70% of the farm tire market is in bias ply tires, there's been a change in that market," says Bill Schafer, vice president of marketing

and sales, Michelin North America Agricultural Tires (owners of the BFGoodrich brand). "We've been looking at the change in tire imports, and more tires are coming from China and Eastern Europe."

That changes the price structure for bias ply tires. For a European manufacturer like Michelin, that can alter the product makeup. Schafer notes that BFGoodrich has actually been working down its inventory of bias ply tires for the past three years. "That was on purpose. We knew the direction

the market was heading," he adds. "The market for bias ply tires is being commoditized by these new imports."

What about the BFGoodrich brand? Schafer says the line has a long history, and the brand isn't going away. Instead, the brand will be home to the company's value-priced radial replacement tires for farmers "who need the benefits of radial technology on their late-model and mid-sized 100- to 200-horsepower tractors," according to a press statement.

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