

Farmer Solutions

Organized on-farm research provides another layer of independent data for decisions.

My dad always got my attention around the farm when he used the word *experiment*. That meant we were trying something new. And when we tried something new, well, who knew what might result. Trying and learning new stuff on the farm was even more exciting than lab experiments in school!

Mostly what my dad called an *experiment* was doing something a bit different and observing what happened. Today, however, more farmers are working in concert to follow scientific methodology as they all test a specific practice on their farms. What began 11 years ago as an initiative called the On-Farm Network of the Iowa Soybean Association has spread to 11 states. See Rich Fee's article, "Grassroots Research," beginning on page 42 for a full report on the growth of the network.

"If growers don't organize to collect true, independent, third-party data, they're going to be at the mercy of those who have data," Tracy Blackmer, director of research for the On-Farm Network, tells Fee. "I believe that collecting this data can be the competitive edge for growers. If every grower in Iowa did one trial, we'd have over 40,000 trials. Through that, we would learn so much about how to improve our management. Most growers agree they can do at least one thing better. The question is how do you find it. I believe this network can find it."

FRONT AND BACK COMBINE SOLUTIONS

Football coaches talk a lot about how their preparations made for game day and how their adjustments during games are critical to winning. The same can be said for achieving top combine operation.

Machinery Director Dave Mowitz shares many ideas for dealing with heavy residue in the cover story, "Stalked," on pages 18 and 34. The surest solution, Mowitz reports, is making sure your combine's residue-management system is in good repair with sharp knives and belts.

"If a corn head is doing its job, the only thing coming out the back of a combine should be cobs and husks," says Paul Jasa, University of Nebraska agricultural engineer.

Adjusting the combine for yield losses is well worth your time, Crops Technology Editor Gil Gullickson reports in his High Yield Team series article, "Halt Harvest Losses," on page 54. The article tells how to do it.

"A payback of \$50 to \$100 per hour is common if you check for losses at harvest," Iowa State University Extension agricultural engineer Mark Hanna tells Gullickson. •

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Successful Farming®

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