

ISA On-Farm Network™ Allows Easy Testing of Products, Ideas

There have always been some farmers, call them innovators or experimenters or whatever, who are constantly trying new ideas, new machines or new practices in search of higher yields, higher profits, reduced labor and so on.

The advent of global positioning systems, combine yield monitors and aerial imagery have allowed farmers to test production practices and products more easily than ever before. Using side-by-side strips, marked with GPS, where the only difference is the practice or product being tested, growers can record harvest information with yield monitors and the previously recorded GPS locations and then look for yield differences that tell them definitively whether the new practice was economical.

That's the basis of the Iowa Soybean Association On-Farm Network™ agronomic programs. More than 400 soybean and corn growers from all over the state participated in these programs during 2005. In most instances, their data has been submitted to ISA for processing and analysis. Depending on the programs they were involved in and the timing, they have or will receive aerial imagery of their crop fields that can tell them even more about the comparisons they've made.

On-Farm Network program participants pay nothing

for this service from ISA, other than the direct cost of establishing their strip trials.

Besides learning what works best on their farms, these growers are also contributing to a growing database of crop production practice information that's being used by the association to inform and educate state and federal legislators, government professionals working in conservation, agriculture and environmental programs, and crop advisors and technical service providers at a number of levels.

The number of participants in 2005 was more than double that from 2004, thanks in part to significant funding from a Conservation Innovation Grant from the USDA National Resources Conservation Service. Other funding for these programs comes from the soybean checkoff, the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship's Soil Conservation Division, through their Integrated Farm and Livestock Management Program, and grants and in-kind support from Pioneer HiBred International, Deere and Company, the Altria family of companies, Environmental Defense, The Nature Conservancy, the McKnight Foundation, BASF, Syngenta, and a host of local and area farm supply companies and farmer-owned cooperatives.

Here's how to participate

1. Contact the Iowa Soybean Association to let us know you'd like to take part. Call 800-383-1423 or email info@isafarmnet.com.
2. Yield monitor and GPS facilitate these trials. If you have a yield monitor and GPS, you have everything you need. If you don't have these and would still like to participate, talk to Dr. Tracy Blackmer, director of research, or Patrick Reeg, field research operations manager, for ideas on how to proceed.
3. Follow the protocols ISA provides for the type of trial you want to run. For example, strips for nitrogen rate trials should be marked with GPS and with flags that can be left in the field to direct equipment for application, planting and harvesting.
4. Provide field location information to ISA. Legal description or GPS coordinates will work.
5. Manage the entire field the same except for the one variable, which is the product, application rate, or practice being tested.
6. Keep proper yield monitor records during harvest and provide these immediately to ISA for analysis.

After harvest, ISA provides all participants with a report for their individual trials and summaries of similar trials so they can see how the product or practice performed for other farmers. For some trials, ISA also provides aerial imagery and other field maps and reports related to the study.