

Weckerly Farms takes farming high tech

Northern Plains agriculturists use variable-rate data, prescription fertilizers and premium seed varieties to reduce costs and boost yields.

Hurdsfield, ND, April 3, 2014 — Brothers Chad and Cole Weckerly come from solid farming stock; their great grandfather founded Weckerly Farms more than 60 years ago. But that doesn't mean they're living in the past. With the encouragement of their father Terry Weckerly, the brothers have been instrumental in implementing real-time, cutting-edge technology to propel Weckerly Farms, as well as their peers, into the future of farming.

“Growing up, there was never any doubt that I was going to be a farmer,” Chad says. He left the farm only long enough to earn his degree in agricultural economics. Cole received a business management degree with a minor in entrepreneurship and brought that entrepreneurial spirit back to the family business in 2007.

Chad and Cole saw others in the industry using new technologies — like evaluating variable-rate data through new software and utilizing prescription fertilizers — and became interested in how they could put some of those ideas into practice for Weckerly Farms as well as the farmers they served through their seed dealership arm, Hurdsfield Grain.

“There's a great community of growers and dealers learning new ways through trial and error,” Cole shares. “We don't view each other as competition. We're not worried about one-upping each other; we're worried about the untreated acre.”

Growing their knowledge through seminars and open-forum groups, the Weckerly brothers expanded their offerings to include a full-scale implementation of variable-rate technology and immediately began reaping additional benefits from the varieties they carry, particularly Limagrain Cereal Seeds' LCS Breakaway, LCS Powerplay, LCS Albany and LCS Iguacu.

“Albany has a high yield potential, and I would sell Breakaway to any grower,” says Chad. “Breakaway is fit for variable-acre terrain and results in top-end yield with protein.”

While they are clearly driven to explore the limits of new technology, the brothers understand that it all comes back to improving the bottom line for farmers.

“Growers make money by increasing their yield and lowering their input costs,” Cole says. “Before we had these variable-rate methods, growers might go to the effort to zone sample each field every year, which can get expensive. Through experience, we have found fields where we can eliminate or reduce the frequency of zone sampling to reduce costs.”

The Weckerlys' high-tech toolkit includes Ag Data Mapping Solutions — a software program from GK Technologies that creates multiple-layer maps reflecting data like topography, yield, drainage planning and variable-rate fertilizer application — and Veris — a machine that measures the textures of soil through electrical conductivity to make soil sampling maps.

With the information gathered from their high-tech testing, the Weckerlys can make recommendations on how to fertilize based on the different Limagrain Cereal Seeds variety agronomic packages and each farmer's yield goals. The Weckerleys are quick to point out that while deciphering variable-rate data might sound complicated, it doesn't have to be.

“We have the tools to do anything a farmer wants,” explains Cole. “It's fun to take the farmer's vision and produce success, and most growers are already set up for these technologies.”

The Weckerlys already have their eyes on a new gadget: an unmanned aerial system.

“We can let that thing fly at 120 miles per hour and get down to sub-foot accuracy, which provides more uniform data,” Chad says. “That's the future.”

Weckerly Farms is a diversified farming operation located in Hurdsfield, ND. The family-owned farm has been working the land for generations, growing a variety of crops and offering an array of seed varieties, including wheat, corn and soybeans.

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