MASTER CLASS

Top 5 Factors to Producing a Top Crop

Seed Seller ACADEMY

Letter From Rod

Regardless of when planting takes place in your territory, it remains the most important time of year for all seed sellers and their customers.

After all, planting season is the time of year when both you and your customer are determining your future success. It is also the best chance for you, the seed seller, to lead the grower where he doesn't know he needs to go.

Spring is the time of year when you can help growers the most by getting that crop planted properly so it can produce to its potential. Remember, 75% of a farmer's yield is determined the day the crop is planted.

The key to your success and your customer's success is following the *Top 5 Factors to Producing a Top Crop*.

If you ask the average farmer what the number one factor is for producing a top crop, he will likely say it's the weather. As important as weather is, it is not number one. And the reason it is not number one is because he has to deal with weather every year—and it's the same weather as his neighbors. So the farmer who does the best job of protecting his crop from the weather, out-produces everyone else. A grower may say the number one factor is the variety you plant—again, he would be wrong.

Give me any variety that exists in the marketplace today—I don't care how old it is in the maturity ranges I can use—and I will beat your best variety every single year by minimizing the damage these 1,000 variables cause.

I'm going to teach you about the Top 5 Factors to Producing a Top Crop. As you learn about each of the Top 5 Factors, keep in mind that not only are these the Top 5 Factors to Producing a Top Crop, but they are also ***listed in order of their importance***. Each one is also affected by the one listed before it.

It's our most sincere hope that our Master Class will help you grow your sales and help you succeed in selling the most difficult product in the world.

Happy Selling,

Rod

"We can't live on hope in the seed business. Too many farmers and too many seed sellers like to live on hope. I hope the weather is good. I hope conditions change so everything works out right. To succeed, we can't live on hope. Instead, we have to take control of everything we can control."

– Rod Osthus

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1,000 Variables

1,000 Variables

Let me ask you an important question.

What would it take to ensure your products perform the way you want them to every year on every customer's farm?

I'm going to give you a number right now that's going to change your life and I want you to remember this number for the ***rest of your seed-selling career***.

The number is 1,000.

There are more than 1,000 variables that affect the performance of your varieties every year.

Let me repeat—more than 1,000 variables affect the *intended* performance of the living organism (your products) on your customers' farms every single year.

When you combine all the different management systems farmers use with the innumerable types of environmental factors out there, you end up with more than 1,000 variables.

How many variables have you experienced so far this year?

We're experiencing one of the biggest variables again this growing season—water. Water alone can create over 400 variables. For example, imagine having too much water. When did we have *too much* water—at V1, V2, V3, or V4 vegetative stages of growth or was it at R1, R2, R3, or R4 reproductive stages of growth? And when did we have *too little* water at any of those stages?

Now add that concept to the different stages of growth two or more *different varieties* are in and how each reacts to the variable amounts of water, and you will have hundreds of different effects. Now add in other variables from nature, wind, insects, disease, and so on, to the various management systems and you have more than 1,000 different reasons why your products may not perform to your or your customer's expectations.

The real question is how do you minimize the damage from those 1,000 variables that will, by the way, show up every year? How do you protect your product's performance so it can produce to its potential?

The answer—you get your customers to help you!

The only job your customers have is to ***protect product performance*** at all costs. Your job is to keep your growers focused on that single deed.

In the next section, I'm going to show you the secret to minimizing the damage from those 1,000 variables. I've taken this secret and boiled it down into 5 steps.

MASTER CLASS

Top 5 Factors to Producing a Top Crop

1

Soil conditions at planting

It doesn't matter how good your genetics are or how great your seed quality is if you plant the seed in lousy conditions. And the reason it's number one is because farmers violate it every single year. They believe the planting season is only 7-10 days long so they hurry to get the crop in, regardless of whether or not conditions are right. Farmers have been told for years that the earlier they plant the crop, the higher the yield will be.

Planting Season…Get It RIGHT, Not RUSHED!

Am I a fan of early planting?
Yes.

Are there advantages to planting early?
Some.

Is early planting the secret to getting top yields every year?
No! Absolutely not.

Your customers love to plant as early as they can. They've come to believe the earlier they get the seed in the ground, the higher their yields will be. Most growers also believe they risk huge yield penalties if they plant after their early window.

Most growers are in too much of a rush to get their seed in the ground in order to "git-r-done" rather than getting it done *properly.*

They become so focused on planting early that they forget they have over an entire month of good planting time still available—not just a few days.

After all, significant yield losses due to late planting seldom become reality. There are just too many other variables that overshadow planting date. After over forty years in the seed business, I've found one planting truth to be self-evident—early spring planting does not dictate the kind of crop we harvest; summer and fall do.

Over the years, we've planted corn ultra-early and harvested immature cream-style grain.

We've also planted our crop ultra-late (long after the planting window had supposedly passed) and successfully harvested mature, dry, and heavy grain in the fall.

Now, it's important to note every year you will hear University and County extension agents rant and rave on the radio and in newspaper articles about the bushel increase you can get by planting early.

Plenty of tests and trials over the years have proved that this is correct.

When everything else is right you can get a bump of 2–5% increase in yield.

BUT….

Today our goal is to achieve a 20–30% increase in yield in a single year, and achieving that kind of goal has less to do with planting date and more to do with soil conditions at planting.

When soil conditions are right, planting date becomes largely irrelevant.

Keep that important fact in mind when your customers talk about hearing their neighbors brag how they were the first ones in the field and the first ones done planting.

2

Seed placement

Can you have good seed placement without good soil conditions? No.

If a farmer doesn't have the number one factor in place, he won't have number two—good seed placement.

Seed placement is all about seeding depth and proper seed-to-soil contact. Despite the fact that implement sellers tell farmers they can drive 10 mph to plant, unless you have a perfect field, you will not be successful. In addition to good singulation, the goal is have every plant emerge within 12 hours of each other. Any plant that is 1-2 leaves behind will not produce to its potential.

The key is accuracy—NOT speed.

Spring is not a time to focus on speed. It is a time to focus on accuracy.

Every grower should be instructing his planting team on accuracy and not speed. It seems everyone involved in production agriculture, from input suppliers to the grower, does everything they can to get the planting season over with as quickly as possible.

Instead of slowing it down so farmers can do it right, they all rush around and get farmers wound even tighter than they normally would be. Farmers also contribute to their own sense of panic by increasing the size of their planters and then driving even faster.

If growers want the most perfect stands and the highest yields, the recommended planting speed is 4.0 mph. But try getting a farmer to slow down below 6.0 mph when he just got a new planter that *seems* to work just as well at high speeds as it does at slow speeds.

The problem is he wants to impress his neighbors by the number of acres he planted in a day instead of by how good a job he did. Ag suppliers, seed companies, and crop consultants are all speed-minded. Unfortunately, they worry more about getting it done fast, instead of making sure they're getting it done right.

You need to deliver the ***Do It Right and Not Rushed*** message to all your customers and their planter operators as often as possible. So when you get behind your customers' planter this season, be sure to remind them the planting window is approximately 45 days long (in most parts of the country), and not a week.

Tell them to visualize the planting season as being three times as long as they think it is. That attitude alone will help farmers take more time when planting so they can do as many things as *close to perfect* as possible.

His goal should be to raise 30-50% more yield, each year, over the neighbor who rushes during planting. That is a significant advantage for what little bit of extra time it takes to plant the crop at a slower pace.

After all, your customer will be harvesting and getting paid for his crop this fall, not his neighbors!

Perfect Seed Placement Means Every Plant Emerges Within 12 Hours of Each Other!

Planting Speed Can Kill Yield

The following charts show:

- The small amount of time saved during the average 40-day planting season by driving faster than the ideal planting speed of 4.0-4.5 mph.
- The best strategy is to increase planter size, rather than speed.
- The narrower the rows, the greater the need for larger planters.

No. of 10 Hour Days to Plant 1,000 Acres with a 12 Row Planter

Mph	x	Ft/Mile	x	R-Width	÷	Sqft/Acre	x	No. Row	x	No. Acres	÷	Acres/Hr	10hr Days
4.0		5,280		20”		43,560		12		1,000		9.7	10.3
4.5				20”				12		1,000		10.9	9.2
5.0				20”				12		1,000		12.2	8.2
5.5				20”				12		1,000		13.4	7.5
6.0				20”				12		1,000		14.6	6.8
4.0				30”				12		1,000		14.6	6.8
4.5				30”				12		1,000		16.4	6.1
5.0				30”				12		1,000		18.2	5.5
5.5				30”				12		1,000		20.0	5.0
6.0				30”				12		1,000		21.9	4.6

No. of 10 Hour Days to Plant 1,000 Acres with a 24 Row Planter

Mph	x	Ft/Mile	x	R-Width	÷	Sqft/Acre	x	No. Row	x	No. Acres	÷	Acres/Hr	10hr Days
4.0		5,280		20”		43,560		24		1,000		19.4	5.2
4.5				20”				24		1,000		21.9	4.5
5.0				20”				24		1,000		24.3	4.1
5.5				20”				24		1,000		26.7	3.7
6.0				20”				24		1,000		29.1	3.4
4.0				30”				24		1,000		29.1	3.4
4.5				30”				24		1,000		32.7	3.0
5.0				30”				24		1,000		36.4	2.7
5.5				30”				24		1,000		40	2.5
6.0				30”				24		1,000		43.6	2.3

No. of 10 Hour Days to Plant 2,000 Acres — All Row Widths

Mph	x	Ft/Mile	x	R-Width	÷	Sqft/Acre	x	No. Row	x	No. Acres	÷	Acres/Hr	10hr Days
4.5		5,280		20”		43,560		48		2,000		43.7	4.6
4.5				20”				36		2,000		32.8	6.1
4.5				20”				24		2,000		21.9	9.1
4.5				20”				16		2,000		14.6	13.7
4.5				20”				12		2,000		10.9	18.3
4.5				30”				48		2,000		65.5	3.1
4.5				30”				36		2,000		49.1	4.1
4.5				30”				24		2,000		32.7	6.1
4.5				30”				16		2,000		21.8	9.2
4.5				30”				12		2,000		16.4	12.2

3

Seed quality

This is when the seed company helps out the farmer by bringing him seed quality that's exceptional.

Seed quality is far more important than genetics. You give me an average genetic package with a superior seed quality, and I will beat your superior genetic package with average seed quality every single time.

But what good is top seed quality if it's not placed in the soil properly and you have poor soil conditions?

Quality has become such an overused, under-defined term that its meaning is more generic in nature than it is attention-getting.

So many companies talk about having exceptional quality products and services, but few tell their customers what that actually means.

Everyone knows the power of real quality and its ability to attract and keep customers. But those who have been exposed to performance-killing poor quality also know how fast it can destroy customer loyalty.

If product quality is not superior, the products themselves can't perform to their potential.

They are not allowed to do what they're promised to do—and that is to please customers.

Quality is the number one crowd pleaser.

Too high quality never makes anyone angry, but too low quality always does.

How anyone could turn this number one factor to achieving customer satisfaction and getting repeat business into a *one-size fits* all strategy is beyond me.

Not everyone has great quality; in fact, many don't even know what level their quality is. So how can so many companies claim they have it, when they really don't?

Well, it catches up with them in the customer's field.

I'm a former Registered Seed Technologist. I've followed seed quality intently for the past forty-plus years. I got my first glimpse of quality seed (and what some companies were trying to pass off as quality seed) starting in 1968 when I got a job working in the South Dakota State Seed Laboratory.

In the four years I worked there, I learned about all kinds of seeds, their physiology, and their growth potential. Upon graduation from college, my new employer, Trojan Seed Company, paid for my trip to Salt Lake City, Utah, to take the rigorous test to become a Registered Seed Technologist.

I passed the exam and, even though I no longer run a seed testing lab, I still have the knowledge and information I worked so hard to gain. I will always understand the quality of a living organism like seed has a huge impact on field performance.

As important as seed quality is to a grower, companies supplying seed have not done a good job of telling their customers how to manage quality once they receive it in the seed they buy. And if they don't tell them how to manage it, instead of having a positive effect on profit, it can actually take profit away.

For example, one of the reasons seed quality has lost its impact as a product value is because seed companies have allowed growers to think that the newest and latest seeds they buy are damage proof.

That is, they believe that no matter how they treat the seed, it is physiologically so strong that it won't be negatively affected.

They believe they can handle it, store it, and plant it anywhere, anytime, and in any type of soil or environmental condition. Instead of receiving a list of instructions for how to properly manage the living and breathing baby seed they receive in every bag, box, bulk bag, or truck load, they get nothing to tell them how to protect the quality they receive.

It doesn't matter what brand or variety of seed a farmer buys if the quality is not at its best.

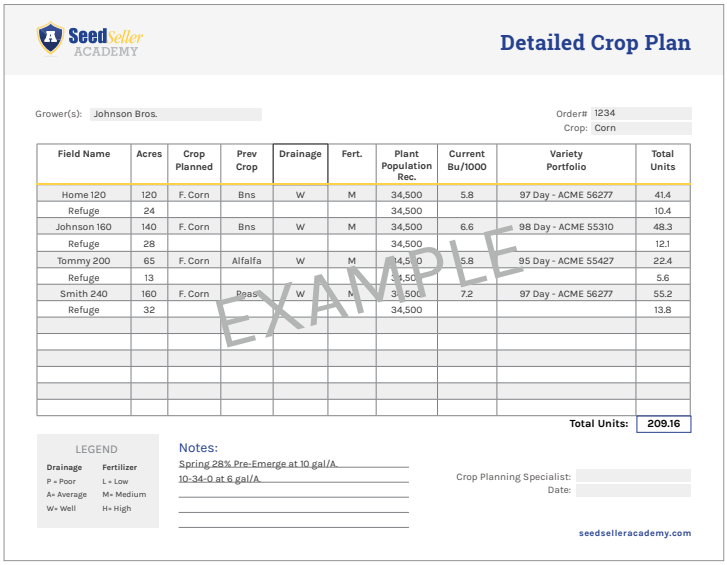
Seed quality trumps all other factors affecting varietal performance—including genetics. Your grower needs to know it doesn't just start with the seed; it actually starts with the quality of the seed.

4

The right variety in the right field

Seventy-five percent of all varieties never yield to their potential because they're planted on the wrong piece of ground. Yet, few seed sellers take the time necessary or even know how to place the right products in their growers' fields.

They just sell farmers product, drop off product, and then the farmer puts it wherever he wants. Too many farmers are allowed to plant their varieties wherever they want, but every year it costs them plenty.



SeedSeller ACADEMY

Detailed Crop Plan

Grower(s): Johnson Bros.

Order# 1234
Crop: Corn

Field Name	Acres	Crop Planned	Prev Crop	Drainage	Fert.	Plant Population Rec.	Current Bu/1000	Variety Portfolio	Total Units
Home 120	120	F. Corn	Bns	W	M	34,500	5.8	97 Day - ACME 56277	41.4
Refuge	24					34,500			10.4
Johnson 160	140	F. Corn	Bns	W	M	34,500	6.6	98 Day - ACME 55310	48.3
Refuge	28					34,500			12.1
Tommy 200	65	F. Corn	Alfalfa	W	M	34,500	5.8	95 Day - ACME 55427	22.4
Refuge	13					34,500			5.6
Smith 240	160	F. Corn	Peas	W	M	34,500	7.2	97 Day - ACME 56277	55.2
Refuge	32					34,500			13.8

EXAMPLE

Total Units: 209.16

LEGEND

Drainage	Fertilizer
P = Poor	L = Low
A= Average	M= Medium
W= Well	H= High

Notes:
Spring 28% Pre-Emerge at 10 gal/A
10-34-0 at 6 gal/A

Crop Planning Specialist:
Date:

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Cropping Plans

This is why we start cropping plans six to nine months ahead of planting—to help customers make those kinds of decisions.

Getting growers to write cropping plans prior to harvest is one of the foundational principles I teach in my trainings and it fundamentally changes how you sell.

BONUS Podcast:

12 Reasons Why You Never Split a Planter!

The number of farmers that still want to split their planters continues to amaze me.

They put one seed variety in half the boxes and another variety in the other half and plant them simultaneously to eventually compare and decide which one is the superior product.

Many growers think that by splitting their planters they can learn so much—they believe it's like their very own research plot.

But nothing could be further from the truth.

Instead of learning *more* about each variety, growers actually *distort* the facts.

Click the link below to listen to my podcast on *12 Reasons Why You Never Split a Planter* and check out the corresponding infographic on the following pages.

Listen to Podcast

rcthomas.com/014/

12 REASONS

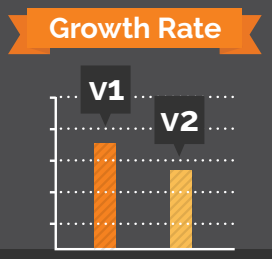
WHY YOU NEVER SPLIT A PLANTER:

01

Growers don't know emergence ratings to make sure both varieties emerge within 12 hours of each other. Any plant that is 1-2 collars behind all others when it emerges will not produce a full ear. There should be no more than 12 hours variation among emerging seedlings.

02

Growers can't avoid negative effects of post-planting and pest control management strategies on varieties in different stages. For example, when raising corn, standard operating procedure is to apply fungicide between V4 and V6 and again at VT. And that goal cannot be accomplished if the varieties have different growth rates. The window for application will be missed for one of the varieties and that will be highly detrimental to its performance.



03

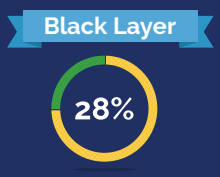
Growers don't know when each of the varieties needs nutrients. When does each of the varieties take up most of their nitrogen? Most Farmers have no idea, yet they often make a single application and expect it to be adequate for both varieties, regardless of environmental conditions, and that can greatly affect nutrient availability.

04

Growers must know flowering dates and silk dates which are necessary to make sure there is uniform pollen available for all varieties in the field at all times. But few, if any, have that information. Having two varieties in the same field that are flowering at different times, actually decreases the amount of pollen available—it does not increase it.

05

Growers don't know days to black layer for each variety to estimate uniform, optimum harvest time, in order to produce the highest yields possible. Optimum yields occur when corn is harvested between 22% and 28% moisture. Anything below those levels can result in up to 10% invisible yield loss. Unless this information is known, one variety may black layer and begin drying down a week, or more, earlier than the later one. That means at least half of the field is below the ideal harvest moisture which costs the farmer big profits.

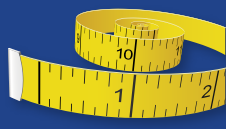


06

Most growers don't know the rate of dry down, stalk ratings, standability ratings, and overall expectations of plant health for each variety. Every variety is different. They all have strengths and weaknesses. Farmers need to know what those strengths and weaknesses are so they can manage them throughout the season. Most varietal weaknesses require applications of nutrients at key times. And that cannot be done when two varieties are mixed together in the same field.

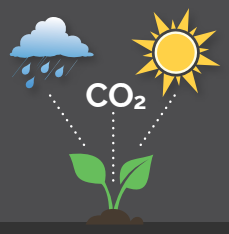
07

Growers most often don't know exact plant heights, or even how to properly measure plant heights, to make sure any rate of growth differences don't overshadow one of the varieties. One of the greatest concerns researchers have when testing varieties for yield is border effect. Border effect occurs when hybrids are planted side-by-side, but one is taller than the other, shading the shorter variety from adequate sunlight. (Read #8 to discover why avoiding border effect is so important.)



08

95% of what goes into a corn plant comes from the air in the form of CO2, water and sunlight that creates photosynthesis, a mechanism by which the plant produces food for itself. Any interruption in that process can have devastating effects on a variety's ability to produce top yields. This is the reason why plants that fall behind early in the spring can never catch-up. They are constantly shaded by the larger plants around them that steal the life-giving sunlight.



09

When varieties are planted alternately across a field, the farmer can't fix a problem with just one of the varieties, should it occur. How do you replant a field if it is called for? Worse yet, how do you harvest a field if, for some reason, one variety becomes lodged and the other one is standing perfectly? That is a very difficult situation to be in during harvest.

10

How would you stop a disease that starts in one variety and moves to another? Once a disease moves into a field, it is already too late to prevent the damage. And when a variety that does not normally get the disease has been placed beside a susceptible variety, it can get the disease, too.

11

Any difference in maturity between the two varieties prolongs the length of time damaging insects may remain in a field. We know that insects always look for the freshest, youngest hosts on which to feed and lay their eggs. For example, rootworm beetles and other insects find the youngest silks possible when entering a cornfield. If you have a field that alternates two varieties across the field and they silk at different times, you're going to have young silks that are attractive to insects in that entire field for a much longer period of time.

12

Growers don't learn about differences in the genetic abilities of each variety because rather than narrowing down the variables, they increase them geometrically when splitting the planter.

5

Post-planting management

What happens after the crop is planted?

This is critical every year, because crops are in all kind of stages throughout the country.

What are you doing on a daily basis to monitor your customers' crops and nurture them to maximum yields in the fall? This 5th factor involves the farmer continuing to protect every variety's performance at all costs. He must not skip steps in extra applications of fertilizer, fungicides, and insecticides throughout the season. Sellers must make sure they don't turn that irrigator off too soon to save a little money. As market prices fluctuate, farmers tend to pull back from taking care of a crop and, instead, begin to *punish* it by not giving it what it really needs when it really needs it.

Remember our goal with these five factors is to minimize the damage from the 1,000 variables.

MASTER CLASS

Visiting Planters

Visiting Planters

So many top germplasms have failed to perform to their potential each and every year because the Top 5 Factors to Producing a Top Crop were violated.

So how do you, the seed seller, help your prospects and customers follow the Top 5 Factors?

Simple.

It all starts at planting.

That's right.

After all, four of the five Top Factors must be executed at the planter and can't be fixed later.

You only have one chance to get these right.

That is why it is absolutely, positively imperative you are visiting planters each spring as your customers are planting your products.

Regardless of when planting takes place in your territory, it remains the most important time of year for all seed sellers and their customers. Planting season is the time of year when both you and your customer are determining your future success.

It is also the best chance for you, the seed seller, to put yourself in a true leadership position in the grower's mind. This is the time of year when you will get to help growers control the most important variables that affect their level of success when growing their crop.

By now you are probably asking questions like:

- What do I even do on a planter visit?
- How long should the visit take?
- How do I even get a farmer to stop in the middle of planting?
- I'm not a planting expert—what can I possibly say to an experienced farmer?

These questions are very typical and, if you asked any of these questions, you are not alone. That is precisely why I created an entire program called ***Planting Customers***. It's the most important customer contact you can possibly have with a farmer.

When you visit customers' planters, you notice changes in your customers just by being there. But when you visit your customers' planters with a plan, you see permanent positive changes take place. What kinds of changes would you like to make in your customers today?

I bet you can list a lot of them.

- How would you like to get them to place an order with you when you want them to?
- How would you like to get them to pay when you want them to pay?
- How would you like to get them to follow your instructions on how to use your products?
- How would you like to get them to plant your products with more care?
- How would you like to change how they really measure the performance of one of your varieties?

You can make all those things happen just by *Planting Customers.* Let's begin by defining Planting Customers. Planting Customers is a strategy when seed sales reps make the most important customer contact of the selling season. You see, very few seed sellers understand the new selling season *begins* the day your customer's planter rolls. That means both you and your customer begin thinking about *planning for next year* at planting time.

Visting Planters revolutionizes every customer relationship in a simple 10-minute stop.

So make sure next spring your customers are following the Top 5 Factors and they will, in fact, produce a top crop!

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