

"Best & Worst Buy" Seed Corn Survey

What's the best seed corn variety you planted last year? What's the worst? How many acres of each variety did you plant? How could seed corn companies improve in terms of service, price, varietal information, etc.?

These are some of the questions we asked 3,000 randomly selected corn growers in an effort to highlight seed corn varieties and companies that perform with flying colors, and to pinpoint the "lemons" that fail because of poor performance.

FARM SHOW's survey indicates that drastic changes have taken place during the last decade in market share between the two industry giants, Pioneer and Dekalb-Pfizer Genetics. In 1977, when FARM SHOW last reported industry statistics, Pioneer had a market share of right at 30% and Dekalb's share stood at 20%. Today, Dekalb and Pioneer have increased their combined market dominance to 54% but their respective market shares have changed. According to our survey, Pioneer seed corn is now grown on approximately 42% of all U.S. corn acres while Dekalb's share has fallen to around 12%. Of all farmers who responded, 55% plant at least some Pioneer and 23% plant at least some Dekalb. Other companies that made strong showings in our survey — but none of which had a market share above 3.5% — were Jacques, Garst, AgriPro, NC+, Funks, Crow, Prinestons, Landmark, Keltgen, Good Buddy, Northrup King, and Agri-Gold. Corn farmers reported growing more than 100 different varieties.

The most-often heard complaint from farmers concerned price. "Seed corn companies raised prices to cover costs when land and commodity prices went up. Now they should lower prices to reflect changed market conditions," was a common refrain by respondents.

At planting time, 57% of corn growers surveyed plant corn with a Deere planter, 23% plant with International, 7% with White or Oliver, 5% with Allis Chalmers, and the rest use a variety of other machines. Right at 30% of the farmers reported that they had at least tried no-till and 7% say they're already using ridge till on some of their corn acres.

Here's how the rest of our survey shaped up:

"Pioneer is the highest-priced, over-rated corn I've ever planted. Lester Pfister corn gets the highest yields on my farm," says Marcus Wiley, Lebanon, Ind., who says he recently "narrowed up" from 36 to 30-in. rows and has started to no-till corn straight into soybean ground.

"Jacques seed is my worst buy," says Robert Martin, Marthasville, Mo. "Its size didn't run true so our stand was off due to doubles and skips. The same planter worked fine with Pioneer and Dekalb."

Mark Kenan, Rippey, Iowa, had good results with Garst 8558 and Pioneer 3475. "It was very dry last year and these numbers handle stress well. EK Premium was the cheapest seed we bought and it lodged badly."

Lynn Stock, Waukon, Iowa, planted five different Pioneer varieties last year. "All did exceptionally well but 3737 was the driest and combined well."

"We tried five different varieties of Pioneer last year. We got the most yield from 3352 and the lowest from 3389, which also had the highest price per unit," says Dale O. Cover, Nevada, Ohio.

Richard Fitzner, Stryker, Ohio, got the same yields from his "best buy" seed corn varieties, Jacques 5400 and Pioneer 3744. "We got the lowest yields and test weights from Pioneer 3389. We had the wrong weather for this corn in our area last year."

"It's easy to pick and yields well but it dries too slow," says Richard Hollermann, Farwell, Minn., about Stauffer BX302 which was a "best buy" along with Cargill's 822. He plants with two old Deere 490 planters welded together.

were going up a few years ago seed companies said they had to charge more. Now that prices have come down, they still charge the same."

"Out of 6 varieties, Keltgen 101 had the poorest yields and poorest drydown. Pioneer 3732 and 3737 both had good yields and good drydown. They're both easy to combine," says George Erbes, Tracy, Minn.

James Aanerud, Donnelly, Minn., plants 2 main varieties, then plants 15 others in 45 acres of test plots. "Dekalb XL8 has been tops other years but last year it was one of my poorer corn varieties. Pioneer 3906 was the best. Some newer varieties yield more but 3906 has been consistent."

"Vorix 2471 had the highest yields of 6 varieties we planted last year," reports Leon Bright, Greenville, Ohio.

Howard Schmidt, Marine City, Mich., likes Pride 1169. "It has large ears and strong stalks. Due to wet weather last fall I still have 4 acres to pick and about 95% of the crop is still standing. It's a good yielder, too. The only problem is that the company doesn't have enough dealers. I have to drive 25 miles."

"Dekalb 656 and Pioneer 3378 are my best yielding varieties. Both have good standability and are easy to harvest. Dekalb T1100 was our worst buy. It has problems with down corn and blight," says Edwin Klinke, Edwardsville, Ill., who's the inventor of a "bridge hitch" designed to pull one Deere planter behind another to plant soybeans in narrow rows. (FARM SHOW Vol. 9, No. 3).

"The yield was 40 bu. per acre lower than the corn surrounding it under the same conditions," says Roy L. Johnson, Jolley, Iowa, disappointed with Garst 8730. He says Dekalb T1100 is his "best buy". "It did everything right and got a high yield."

"Dekalb T1100 and 656 were our best varieties the last two years. They yielded 200 plus bu.," says Philip J. Wright, Manilla, Ind.

Virtut Meyer, Clinton, Iowa, nominates Golden Harvest 2480 and 2465 as "best buys". "They get good yields, they're easy to pick and they combine cleanly."

"Funks 4323 and McAllister 8310 both yielded well and stood up well in the field even though we didn't finish combining until Jan. 15th. NC+ 8331 didn't yield as well as the others although it was planted on good bottom land. It lodged worse than any other variety," says Dennis Sweet, Shannon City, Iowa.

"Pioneer 3377 has yielded more than any other brand for the past 3 years. Golden Harvest 2601, on the other hand, lodges too easily," says DeVern Pahlmann, DeWitt, Neb.

"Yields were good, it has good ear retention, and it gets good yields,"

says Dan Russell, Jefferson, Iowa, pleased with Dekalb 556.

Mark W. Kessler, Crawfordsville, Ind., ranks Agri-Pro 470 and 510 as his "best buys". "Agri-Pro is cheaper and it also out-yielded the Pioneer varieties planted side by side by 7 to 10 bu. per acre. Pioneer 3352 was expensive and it didn't perform anywhere near expectations. Test weight was lousy and it had a very slow drydown."

"Stalk lodging was near 65%," says Roger Cerven, Stanton, Iowa unhappy with Pioneer 3377. "Garst 8388 is our best buy. It may not be the highest yielding every year but it has better roots and stalks for insect and disease tolerance. Year in and year out it is more consistent because of its drought tolerance, standability and good test weight."

"Agri-Gold 6475 was our highest yielder and had the fastest dry down," says Arvil F. Roedel, Mt. Vernon, Ind., who adds that he would like to see seed corn prices come down to reflect the market price for corn.

"I like Gutwein 2424. It gave high yields and dries down fast. Has a real small cob and it husks easy if you want to pick for ear corn," says Jay Logan, Farmdale, Ohio.

"Lynx 4315 is our best variety and Lynx 4235 is our worst since it yielded about 10 bu. per acre less than the 4315," reports Lonnie Fork, Carroll, Neb., who says that this year he plans to run test plots with 8 different companies and 16 different varieties.

"Land-O-Lakes 1071 is our worst buy. It lodged and stayed wet. Husks were tight so it shelled hard," says Albert Kohlmeyer, Chatfield, Minn., who thinks seed corn prices should drop.

Mike Lenz, Newell, Iowa, is pleased with Wilson 1500B. "We got excellent yields and it stood well all year long. Was the driest corn I harvested. Dekalb T1100 yielded fairly well but was way too wet and didn't stand up well at harvest."

"Pioneer 3378 is our worst buy. It didn't yield as well as our other hybrids and was the most costly per thousand at approximately 15% higher. Funks G4522 and G4326 are our best buys. Not only were they the top yielding varieties but they were less expensive per 1000 kernels than either Golden Harvest or Pioneer," says David Richardson, Pine Village, Ind.

"Because of our unusually short growing season last year, this 75-day corn was about the only variety that made a decent crop," says Lloyd Gran, Erskine, Minn., about Pioneer 3969. "Keltgen KS-80, EB-80, and Sigco 077 were all immature at harvest."

"Pride 4422 is an early maturing corn that was down about 18% moisture at harvest. It stood well, dropped no ears, combined easily