

Spring Planter Tune-Up Considerations

With planting season soon approaching, getting ready for this spring can be a hectic and busy time. One crucial thing to do before planting is to take the time to go through your planter and give it a tune-up to make sure that it is running efficiently. Seed is expensive, and making sure that you plant the seed in the ground at the right depth and right population is critical to not wasting valuable seed as well as getting the highest yield possible at harvest time. Here are some helpful things to look for as you tune-up your planter:

- **Leveling the Planter** - Start with a level planter or slightly tipping uphill. If the planter is nose diving, seed tube angles are thrown off and can lead to poor seed spacing and closing wheels will not close the seed trench properly and can result in uneven emergence or a poor stand.
- **Closing the Wheel Assembly** - Closing wheels setup should represent what field conditions and practices you implement on your operation. There are many different closing wheel setups and in no-till it is crucial to pick a setup that closes the seed trench and ensures good seed-to-soil contact. The setup I've seen to close the seed trench the best in the widest range of soil conditions has been one spiked closing wheel along with the OEM rubber closing wheel. The spiked wheel shatters the sidewall of the open trench and the rubber wheel firms the trench together. The closing wheel arm should also be centered over the trench.
- **Check the Depth Gauge Wheels**- Make sure the gauge wheel arms don't have too much play in them and have the correct distance from the disc openers. Replace the arms and bushings if you are out of adjustment. Too big of a gap in the wheels will allow more soil inside and can build up which is a pain to clean out. Having too big of a gap will also lead to a side wall that might not be firm enough and can collapse before the seed is dropped in the bottom of the seed trench causing uneven seed depth and ultimately uneven emergence.
- **Check the Disc Openers** – Both disc openers should be no less than 14 1/2". There should also be a 1 1/2" – 2" area where the disc openers come together to slice through the soil, if not, then shim them to get to the correct amount of blade contact.
- **Row cleaners/ coulter** – With high yields come high residue, and for no-till farmer's the row cleaners help move residue out of the way to allow the row unit to do its job.

Floating row cleaners with depth bands work well for terrain changes as they have constant contact with the soil. The no-till coulter is another highly debated topic and it is my opinion that if you have enough down pressure with the row unit, let the disc openers do the work for you. No-till front leading coulters take extra weight from the unit to get them into the ground and can also throw soil to the side and raise up the gauge wheel making it a shallower depth than planned. But if it works for your operation keep them.

- **Seed meters** – Go through each unit and look at the wear parts and replace them if they are past the correct specifications. Another good thing to do on a yearly basis is have your meters tested.
- **Misc** – check all bushings, bearings, chains and cables. You know your own planter better than anyone else. We only get one good shot at putting the seed in the ground each year and most of us only get 40 times in our career to get it right. Always be checking and learning what's going on behind you.

A quick tune-up can go a long way in minimizing some problems in-season, as well as getting your seed planted right. Seed placement is critical to protecting yield, and with commodity prices being low right now, doing the little things right can pay off in a big way at harvest time. Good luck to everyone this planting season and we look forward to working with you this year!



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