

## A Farmer is Out-Standing in Their Field

“Plant ‘23” is upon us as many growers in this area have begun planting agronomic crops, while other horticultural growers are already well into their planting season.

This hurried, frenzy of activity is nothing short of stressful as farmers simultaneously pray for rain and dodge raindrops while balancing a logistical nightmare, more affectionately known as the “equipment shuffle”. Though not the topic of this article, I must implore all readers to be careful on roadways as farmers and other motorists will surely meet more frequently this time of year than at other times.

The topic at hand is what happens after the planters and drills are back in the shed: in-season crop management decision-making.

The words of the great Mike Tyson can be applied to this topic, “Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the mouth”.

We all come into the growing season with a well-defined, well-orchestrated crop management plan encompassing variety selection, soil fertility, weed control methods, disease mitigation strategies and much more to achieve top line yield and bottom-line profit targets. Though with everything in agriculture, “Plan A” quickly evolves to “Plan G”.

Making decisions with stale information leads to underwhelming performance. Similarly stated, “you can’t manage what you don’t measure”.

Crop scouting provides a window into the current growing conditions at a site-specific level. This in-season management tool provides valuable information agricultural operators may use to pivot in-time to maintain the value of their crop. Here are some crop scouting considerations for this year’s growing season.

Scout early and often: Research suggests timely scouting can save \$80-105/ac in lost revenue at today’s prices, when used to inform timely, early-season management decisions. Generally, weekly scouting trips are recommended to evaluate progress at a relatively short, defined interval.

Zig-Zag across the field: Covering every inch of every field is not possible. Evaluating conditions in various, relatively random regions across the field may provide the best estimation of the true condition. Though ensure that you venture into the lower productive zones (next to tree-lines, top of hills, bottom of hills etc.) to evaluate all regions.

Above and below ground: Checking for pests on the top and bottom as well as the upper and lower leaves are important for an accurate picture of the pest pressure. Similarly, digging up a few roots to assess soil-borne pests and root health can be rather indicative of the crops above-ground performance.

Know what you're looking at: Consult field manuals, reputable websites, local crop consultants, as well as Extension agents to become familiar with common pests and other crop condition indicators.

The age of information: Ensure high-quality and detailed record keeping for ease of access later in the growing season and future years. Additionally, I recommend using the myriad of technologies available including GPS-enabled crop scouting software, as well as drone-based observations to more efficiently identify problem areas for further inspection.

As mentioned, contact your local Extension Agent for further information on crop scouting or for site-specific crop scouting services, sign-up at <https://go.umd.edu/CMD-IPM-Scouting>.

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