

U.S. Farmers Share Planting Insights

U.S. farmers are well into their spring planting seasons with market conditions and weather in different geographic regions influencing their timing and planting decisions.

The U.S. Grains Council (USGC) asked barley, corn and sorghum farmers from across the United States to share information about their planting activities, choices and intentions for the 2016 crop year. These farmers consider market conditions, environmental factors and historical data to guide their work to produce quality coarse grains for the world market.

BARLEY

Buzz Mattelin, Montana

Buzz Mattelin is a third generation farmer in Montana. Mattelin works with a young farmer, training him to take over the nearly 100-year-old farm when Mattelin retires. He grows malt barley, sugar beets, durum wheat and oil seeds in the flood plain of the upper Missouri River.

What time of the year do you plant?

"We plant barley in late April and harvest late July or early August."

What technology do you utilize during planting?

"GPS and auto steer because it helps us be better environmentalists."

Has this been a typical planting season?


"For the past few years, it has seemed that spring, and the beginning of planting season, comes a week or two earlier each year."





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Developing
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What kind of equipment do you use to plant?

“We use an air seeder to plant into no-till ground. It takes more horsepower, but it is worth it.”

What factors influence your planting decisions?

“The economics have to work. In addition, we follow strict crop rotations. Barley works well after beets to keep disease down.”

What are you planning to do differently this growing season?

“We did not buy new equipment like many did during the good years, so we are looking to maybe pick up some good bargains on the used market.”

What do you want your overseas customers to know about your work?

“We understand food is important. When you deal with the United States, you will get a reliable supply and quality product. We will deliver.”

Tim Dillin, Idaho

Tim Dillin operates a century-old farm in Idaho, near the Canadian border. At age 82 Dillin’s father is still active in the farming operation. They raise around 500 acres (202 hectares) of winter wheat and about the same of feed, food and malt barley, along with some Red Angus cattle.

What technology do you utilize during planting?

“GPS and auto steer. We do soil sampling, but



The no-till field on the left shows stubble and plant material from the previous crop. The tilled or plowed field on the right has all previous crop plant material worked into the soil by a plow.



A view of the barley fields on Tim Dillin’s farm in Idaho.


Corn Progress Reports

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) indicates 86 percent of the corn crop was planted by May 22nd, which is 1 percent higher than the five-year average. The states included in the report accounted for 93 percent of the total U.S. corn crop in 2015.

As of May 22nd, Illinois (89 percent), Missouri (97 percent) and Tennessee (97 percent) led the United States in terms of greatest percentage of corn planted. Iowa is 4 percent ahead of its five-year average, as are Kentucky (4 percent), and North Dakota (24 percent). Texas is 12 percent behind its five-year average, as are Michigan (7 percent) and Nebraska (3 percent). These results are attributed to unseasonably cold weather in the northern states.

The USDA estimates that by May 22nd, 60 percent of the total corn crop had emerged, which is 5 percent higher than the five-year average.

Emergence in Illinois is 9 percent more advanced than 2015 records, as well as Kansas (60 percent in 2015 versus 61 percent in 2016) and Kentucky (59 percent in 2015 versus 71 percent in 2016). Texas is 14 percent behind 2015 reports and seems to be the only state with significantly less emergence than the previous year.

USDA Crop Progress reports are available at www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/National_Crop_Progress. 

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have not started using variable rate planting and fertilizer application. We are in an old river bottom that has only been farmed since 1926 when a dike [a structure to prevent floods] was built, so our soils are fertile and fairly even.”

Has this been a typical planting season?

“We were done this year by the end of April. That is early for us. Last year was extremely dry. This year we have had a lot of rain since the first of the year, but little in April so we were able to get into the fields and plant.”

What kind of equipment do you use to plant?

“John Deere no-till, air drill. All our land is either no-till or minimum-till.”

What factors influence your planting decisions?

“Crop rotation and an enterprise budget. What we can make money at. We have a good contract for the food barley, and the feed barley goes to a small local cattle feeding operation. Input costs determine what we grow.”

What do you want your overseas customers to know about your work?

“We are doing our best to produce a safe product in an environmentally conscious way. We do not use any more chemicals than we absolutely have to. We are working to stay competitive, make a living and protect the land.”

Doyle Lentz, North Dakota

Doyle Lentz farms 7,000 acres (2,834 hectares) alongside his wife, three daughters and two employees. They grow barley on contract on their North Dakota farm. They have farmed this land for 118 years producing barley, wheat, and at times beans and peas.

What time of the year do you plant?

“We have about a six-week window from the first of May into June to plant our barley crop.”

What technology do you utilize during planting?

“We use it all – mapping, variable rate technology and section controls. If John Deere makes it, we have it.”

Has this been a typical planting season?

“Yes, though commodity prices have us pretty cost conscious.”

What factors influence your planting decisions?

“We maintain a strict rotation with no barley on corn or barley on barley.”

What do you want your overseas customers to know about your work?

“You will get the best possible quality in the world from the United States. We work to give you what you want.”



Planting equipment on Doyle Lentz's North Dakota barley farm.

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CORN

Ken Rosenow, Wisconsin

Ken Rosenow's Wisconsin operation is a family partnership with his wife and son. They farm 1,100 acres (445 hectares) of corn, soybeans, wheat and hay, and also raise a herd of beef cows.

What time of the year do you plant?

"Starting the end of April and into May, as soon as the soil temperatures are warm enough."

What technology do you utilize during planting?

"We use Round-up Ready varieties of seed corn, with corn borer and rootworm resistance technologies built in. Our tractors are equipped with GPS for planting and fertilizer application."

What factors influence your planting decisions?

"We will cut back on seed with rootworm protection to keep costs down. That is one place we can cut our budget."

What are you planning to do differently this growing season?

"We will plant more corn on corn (fields from last season). We lost some rented ground this year to another tenant who was more optimistic than we are, so we adjusted acreage to keep things balanced."

What do you want your overseas customers to know about your work?

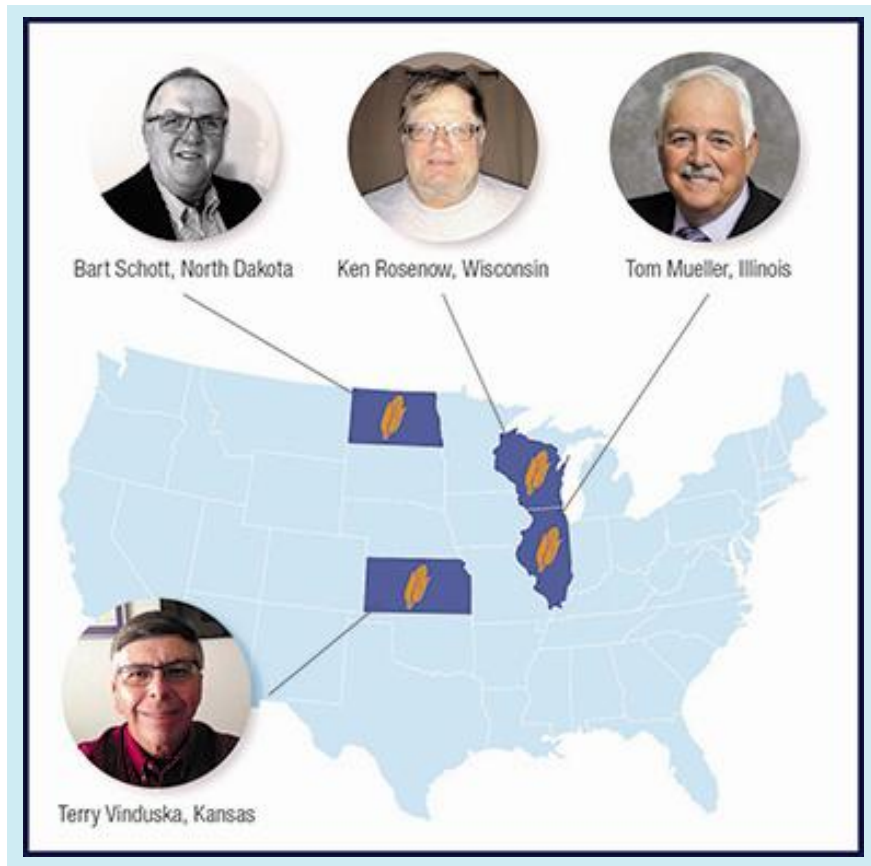
"Exports make a difference to us. Here in Wisconsin, we have good markets in livestock, dairy and ethanol, but it is still exports that affect price and sell the last bushels."

Additional thoughts

"We all have to work together. If the sixth generation on this farm is going to be successful, exports will be more and more important."

Tom Mueller, Illinois

Tom Mueller grows corn and soybeans and has a commercial beef operation just southwest of the Quad Cities [an area of northwest Illinois and southeast Iowa] in Illinois. He is a single operator who hires extra help in the



Planter used on Ken Rosenow's Wisconsin corn farm.

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summer. Mueller grew up in the house his grandpa lived in on the farm.

What time of the year do you plant?

“This is the earliest planting I remember. We started April 18, got rained out, then got back in the field and finished by April 26.”

What technology do you utilize during planting?

“GPS and grid mapping for soil testing and fertilizer application. We only use what we need when we need it.”

Has this been a typical planting season?

“Yes. The soil worked well and the planting went smoothly.”

What kind of equipment do you use to plant?

“A 12-row John Deere planter (I am only a few miles from the John Deere world capital). It is a conservation special with trash openers for zero-till ground.”

What factors influence your planting decisions?

“Price is always on my mind.”

What are you planning to do differently this growing season?

“A little less corn and a few more beans, plus some oats and alfalfa for hay for the cows.”

What do you want your overseas customers to know about your work?

“We are doing everything we can to grow a high-quality crop, and harvest and ship it properly so it is not damaged.”



Corn plants emerge among stubble from a previous crop in a no-till or zero-till field. Photo courtesy of the National Corn Growers Association.

Additional thoughts

“We appreciate your business and look forward to expanding our markets.”

Bart Schott, North Dakota

Bart Schott is the third generation on his North Dakota farm. His son is the fourth generation and together they also own and operate a seed business.

What time of the year do you plant?

“Corn planting for us starts around May 1 and, weather cooperating, finishes about mid-May.”

What technology do you utilize during planting?

“My son is very into the technology, so we are all mapped and zoned for planting and fertilizer. Our equipment will adjust fertilizer application by zone according to soil type. That helps us be sustainable and keep costs down.”

Has this been a typical planting season?

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“It has pretty much been pushing a rock up hill, but that is farming in North Dakota.”

What kind of equipment do you use to plant?

“We plant with a 24-row John Deere planter. Our average field size is 300 acres (121 hectares), so fences and tree rows restrict the size of equipment we can use.”

What factors influence your planting decisions?

“Trying to reduce inputs takes a lot of management, but we cannot overspend our return. We just have to control what we can and hope for the best.”

What do you want your overseas customers to know about your work?

“We are a reliable source of any commodity you want.”

Terry Vinduska, Kansas

Terry Vinduska’s central Kansas farm is set up as a limited liability corporation with his son-in-law and family. They grow corn, soybeans, wheat and sorghum.

What time of the year do you plant?

“We start the end of March and are done around April 20. Earlier-maturing varieties fit our climate, as do those with a tolerance for heat and dry conditions.”

What technology do you utilize during planting?

“GPS to the max – planting, spraying and harvest. Yield mapping is integrated into planting. Technology helps us produce more with fewer people. We raise a better crop more efficiently. It is a tool, not a luxury.”

Has this been a typical planting season?

“It has been much drier than usual. We had no rain from start to finish, and I can only remember a few years like that.”

What kind of equipment do you use to plant?

“We have a 16-row John Deere planter. We are lucky we still have two equipment dealers in our little town. Dealers continue to consolidate, so I do not know how much longer we will have that kind of convenient service.”

What factors influence your planting decisions?

“In these economic times, we are looking at which crops have the best chance of producing a higher than average yield. We dryland farm, so taking advantage of the limited rainfall, fighting weed pressure and crop rotation determine what we plant.”

What are you planning to do differently this growing season?

“Corn acres are up. Wheat and sorghum acres are down. We are looking at an early harvest of our winter wheat. That will allow us to double crop behind it more than usual.”

What do you want your overseas customers to know about your work?



Planting corn in fields with soybean residue that were strip-tilled the previous fall on Terry Vinduska’s Kansas farm.

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“We are reliable supplier of quality grain and co-products. We will always do our best to produce a safe and quality product.”

Additional thoughts

“In the United States, farmers strive to be good stewards of the land, air and water. We are efficient in our use of chemicals and fertilizer – for our bottom line and to turn the land over to the next generation in better shape than we got it. If we can do that, we are successful.”

SORGHUM

Kathy Brorman, Texas

Kathy Brorman’s farm operation in the Texas Panhandle encompasses 13 sections (8,320 acres or 3,368 hectares). The family also owns and operates an insurance agency. Brorman’s four daughters are involved with the farm operation. They grow dryland sorghum, regular grain sorghum and sorghum silage, along with some wheat.

What time of the year do you plant?

“The forage sorghum is planted starting around May 1. That will go to a dairy and beef June we will be planting the grain sorghum that goes through the local grain elevator to the feedstuff and ethanol markets. Then the dryland sorghum is last. It makes a quality ground cover and goes well with our no-till practices.”

Has this been a typical planting season?

“Pretty much, waiting on rain.”

What factors influence your planting decisions?

“Markets, risk management and crop insurance deadlines come into play.”

What do you want your overseas customers to know about your work?

“We are a very family-based operation and we take pride in our stewardship of the land. We use the latest technology and conservation techniques not just for today, but to better it for the next generation.”

Harrison Rigdon, Maryland



Harrison Rigdon is the 11th generation to farm the land issued in a land grant from King George II of England in 1728. The Maryland farm includes around 2,000 acres (810 hectares) of corn, soybeans, wheat, barley, sorghum, hay, some produce and 100 Angus cows.

What time of the year do you plant?

“We start with corn around the last week of April and end with sorghum the end of May.”

What technology do you utilize during planting?

“John Deere Green Star with crop control and auto track.”

Has this been a typical planting season?

“Colder than usual.”

What kind of equipment do you use to plant?

“John Deere 1770NT CCS planter, John Deere 1780 planter and a John Deere 1590 drill. Nearly 90 percent of our land is no-till.”

What factors influence your planting decisions?

“Weather and commodity prices. We plant sorghum in areas with higher deer pressure because they do not like it as much as corn.”

What are you planning to do differently this growing season?

“We are later this year, waiting for soil temps to warm up.”

What do you want your overseas customers to know about your work?

“We plant cover crops to retain nutrients and pay close attention to soil health. It all starts with the soil.”

Additional thoughts

“We try to do the best job we can on the acres we have.”

Carlton Bridgeforth, Alabama

Carlton Bridgeforth farms with his dad, uncle, brothers and cousins on 10,000 acres (4,049 hectares) in Alabama. They raise cotton, wheat, corn, soybeans and sorghum. Bridgeforth is the fifth generation of his family to farm in Alabama.

What time of the year do you plant?

“Early April if it is warm enough.”

What technology do you utilize during planting?

“We are firm believers in technology. From genetics and equipment to streamlined accounting

Technology in use on Harrison Rigdon’s Maryland farm.



Harrison Rigdon is the 11th generation to grow crops on his Maryland corn and sorghum farm.



and inventory systems – we will try it and see if it works. It is where agriculture is headed.”

Has this been a typical planting season?

“About as perfect as we can hope for. We hit it hard for seven to 10 days and finished right before a big rain.”

What kind of equipment do you use to plant?

“We use the same John Deere planter for sorghum that we use for corn.”

What factors influence your planting decisions?

“Crop rotation and input costs.”

A cover crop, or secondary crop, grows in this field. The cover crop helps retain nutrients and contributes to soil health. Photo courtesy of USDA.

What do you want your overseas customers to know about your work?

“It is not the corporations growing crops. It is farmers growing them and selling to the corporations. It would be great to have more visits [with foreign buyers] so we can meet face to face and see what things are like.” ■

2016 U.S. Corn Crop is Sprouting - Follow the Facebook Page

Are you curious how the corn is looking in Kansas, Ohio or other parts of the United States? You can find photos, videos and updates from farmers across the country on the U.S. Grains Council’s (USGC’s) Facebook page, *Growing the 2016 U.S. Corn Crop*.

This active and informative page has weather reports, crop progress updates and notes from corn farmers in different parts of the country. Photos from Missouri in early May showed corn in the eastern part of the state emerging in fields.

Stay in touch with corn production by following the page, which can be found at www.facebook.com/GrowCorn. ■

