Earlier in the year, Crops & Soils magazine came across a poll conducted by Farm Journal Pulse that seemed to indicate the percentage of acres planted to GM corn hybrids would be down this year compared with last year. We wondered if CCAs were seeing similar trends with their clients, so we sent out an informal survey of our own in the July Crops & Soils “New Articles” email. We received 40 responses. This is obviously a very small sample size, but we want to report what we found:

Of the 40 CCAs who responded, 30% reported that their growers planted fewer acres to GM seed this year compared to the previous year. Topping the list of reasons for those switching to non-GM crops was lower seed cost. Seventy-three percent of the CCAs who responded reported that the cheaper cost of conventional hybrid seed was the driving force for growers to make the switch. Nearly all of the responses (92%) reported that the switch to conventional seed occurred for corn while 8% reported the switch was in soybeans.

Steve Dlugosz, CCA and lead agronomist at Harvest Land Coop in Indianapolis, IN, says that while non-GM acreage remains small, he notes there is increasing interest among growers in his coverage area of east-central Indiana and west-central Ohio to try conventional corn and soybean seed varieties as a way to cut crop production costs.

"Input costs are pretty high right now versus what the market premium paid for non-GM corn, notes Dlugosz. One farmer in his region received a premium of $0.40/bu. “That’s a lot,” Dlugosz says. “If you get 200-bu corn, that’s real money.”

Risk and yield

While farmers may save cost by adopting conventional varieties, CCAs argue that other unintended costs associated with conventional seed could eliminate or exceed any cost gains achieved from non-GM seed.

Kent Nichols, CCA and seed manager at Mid-Kansas Cooperative in Moundridge, KS, notes that the shift in acreage from wheat and grain sorghum, both of which are non-GM, to GM soybeans has driven growth in his sales region.

“The amount of acres planted to GM corn increased because we’ve got less wheat and grain sorghum,” Nichols points out. “Corn and soybeans are mostly traited, but you can find a person here or there growing a conventional variety, but it’s very small.”

The market premium paid for non-GM corn can be substantial in some local markets. In his region received a premium of $0.40/bu.

“That’s a lot,” Dlugosz says. “If you grow that, that’s real money.”

But in central Kansas, Nichols points out that market access has limited premiums for non-GM corn, which has further dampened enthusiasm for switching to conventional seed.

Are we seeing increasing interest among growers for non-GM seed varieties?

By Tanner Ehmke
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Certification

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