

Hoegemeyer peers into corn's future

By ANN TONER

RESearchers know a lot about corn genetics, but much remains to be learned, Tom Hoegemeyer, chief technology officer of Hoegemeyer Hybrids, told a large field day audience late this summer.

"With sequencing, you can go into the DNA, look at it piece by piece, and know the genetic code. But that doesn't tell you what it does," he says.

Plant genetics are complicated, due in part to photosynthesis activities. There are 23,000 genes in a human and about 50,000 genes in a corn plant. There are three to five races of people and 250 races of corn.

Some of the new hybrids that are under development have genetic material from Central America and South America, the plant breeder says. Further down the line, there will be more corn varieties bred for different end uses,

with special amino acids to suit their uses.

Farmers will be seeing drought-tolerant corn varieties by 2015 and 2020, he says. Coming soon in disease-resistant traits is anthracnose resistance.

Hoegemeyer also foresees improvements coming in the nitrogen-use efficiency of corn. Currently, only about 50% of the available nitrogen is captured

by the corn plant.

"We need to control what's stealing yield from us," Hoegemeyer says.

Planting advice

Plant corn when soil temperatures reach 50 degrees F or are rapidly warming to that temperature, advises Roger Elmore, Iowa State University agronomist and former University of Nebraska agrono-

mist. Elmore addressed the crowd at the Hoegemeyer Hybrids field day.

Yields are reduced more by planting too late rather than too early. Research at Iowa State finds only a small yield loss with very early planting of corn. Planting 10 days before the optimum window is a safer practice than planting 10 days after the optimum planting window, according to Elmore.

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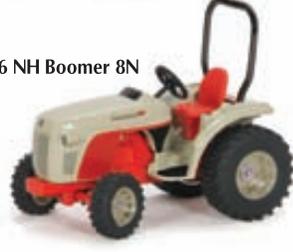
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