



by Bill Lavender

Corn Run revisited 2008

2007 was a year of initiation for many Mid-western ag-operators and pilots. It was the first year that a fungicide was applied to large acreages of tasseling field corn during a very narrow three or four-week time window. A strong export market and ethanol production's high demand for grain products has increased corn prices beyond any level seen before. The economics of applying a fungicide for a 15-20 bushel yield increase in corn became a very simple decision. Even so, many of the applications in 2007 were trials, not so in 2008. The need for applying fungicides, primarily Headline and Quilt to almost every acre of corn, has grown even more.

Last year, *AgAir Update* visited four ag-operators in Illinois and one in Indiana to see how the overwhelming demand for aerial spraying was being handled. There was an element of chaos that was being dealt with efficiently and steadily. This year, Mother Nature threw a curve ball at the best of plans to improve on efficiency to spray more acres of corn. Just as corn planting was well underway in the spring, heavy rains hit throughout the corn-belt. Along the Mississippi River thousands of acres were flooded requiring replanting, or were abandoned. The biggest impact to the aerial applicator was the broken sequence of planting dates that split up the tasseling window.

In some cases, farmers would be part way through planting a field, stop for the day, only to wake the next morning to rain falling on his freshly prepared unplanted ground. For many, it was two to three weeks before they could return to finish planting. Because of this, some fields are receiving split applications, while others will be sprayed entirely when part of the field is at the end of the window for an application and the other part has just become ready to be sprayed, not ideal circumstances. While 2008's corn run was just beginning at the end of July, this time last year the corn run was almost finished.

Benoit Aerial Spraying

Departing AgriFlight, *AgAir Update* headed west to Steve Benoit's operation, northeast of Kankakee, Illinois. Last year the day *AgAir Update* arrived, Steve had been hospitalized after coming in contact with anhydrous ammonia from a ruptured hose. This year, *AgAir Update* found him beneath the belly of a radial Thrush changing out the spreader for the wet system. A highly unusual fertilizing job of ammonium sulfate on potatoes had put a temporary hold on launching 2008's corn run. However, before sunset corn orders were being completed.

Benoit Aerial Spraying operates two Walter-powered Thrushes and two radial Thrushes, up from last year by one radial Thrush. Three of the aircraft use winglets for an 80-foot swath (WRK checked) at two gallons per acre with eleven ASC rotary atomizers per aircraft. Steve has called in an additional eight more aircraft to help during the corn run. "We need to be able to cover 20,000 acres a day," explains Steve.

When asked about the two radial Thrushes, "After 40 years in this business, I never thought I'd be training ag-pilots. But I see the need, especially here at Benoit Aerial Spraying. So, I've added a second radial Thrush to our fleet. I will break in two new pilots this year. I'll pick the safest fields for them. They will each fly half a day and load for half a day. This way they won't get too tired.

To make the 2008 corn run go smoother, this year Benoit Aerial Spraying is calling in the out-of-state aircraft sooner. The company also has a 2,500-gallon bulk tank for the fungicide. Steve noted there is about a half million dollars worth of chemical in the tank when full.



After a trying time removing a spreader (done once a year), Benoit Aerial Spraying is ready for the corn spraying.

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