South Dakotans Like Coated Seed Results

Yackley Ranches of Onida

Above: The Unistand technology (left) produces sunflower seeds uniform in shape, for a consistent size 3, as compared with uncoated seeds (right). The polymer-based technology helps seeds flow through the planter easier and results in more-uniformly spaced plants.

Normally, you’re not going to need a coat while planting sunflower in June in central South Dakota. But father and son Todd and Blake Yackley believe their sunflower seeds can definitely benefit from wearing one.

Most of the sunflower acreage planted by Yackley Ranches of Onida in 2012 was to Syngenta varieties that had been coated with the company’s patented Unistand technology seed coating product. Based on their experiences the past two seasons, the Yackleys intend to make that 100% in 2013.

Todd Yackley says improved singulation and consistency of seed placement were the primary objectives when they first experimented with coated seeds during the 2011 growing season. “In the past, we’ve had issues with achieving the singulation accuracy that we wanted,” says the Sully County producer. “We used some of these coated seeds last year (2011) and really liked them; so we pushed for more in 2012. Probably 95% of our sunflower this year was coated — and they planted as good as corn seed.”

The farm’s JD vacuum planters are equipped with the 20/20 SeedSense monitors and eSet vacuum kits from Precision Planting, Inc. Employee Kurt Reich, who operates one of the planter tractors, reports seeing virtually no doubles while seeding the 2012 sunflower crop — and he attributes that improvement to the use of coated seed. “A lot of times, the singulation read 99.8, 99.9 — even 100%,” he recounts. “We’d run through the corn planter monitor, and half the row units would be registering at 100%.”

“The sunflower stands were almost like ‘picket-fence’ stands, like corn,” Yackley observes. “Before, we used to think, ‘Well, we’re getting 22,000 plants out there — and that’s the main objective since sunflower is a compensating plant.’ But if we get 22,000 spaced every 10 inches, that’s better than having occasional skips or doubles,” he says.

“We haven’t seen any issues with germination or emergence — [e.g.] needing the ground to be wetter,” Yackley adds. “It germinates just like uncoated seed.”

Grant Ozipko, Syngenta oilseeds portfolio head-North America, says the company’s objective in introducing Unistand to the sunflower market was to optimize uniformity of seed size and shape — which in turn would facilitate better singulation and more-consistent seed placement. “Sunflower is often the last crop planted on the farm, and if we can capture any efficiencies there, that helps the grower — not only from a planting speed/accuracy/population perspective, but also [in terms of] agronomic monitoring throughout the season,” he says. “We’re finding that crops emerge evenly with Unistand and then re-

Left to Right: Blake Yackley, Todd Yackley, Brandon Bertsche and Kurt Reich of Yackley Ranches, Onida, S.D.

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main even through the season. That really helps with scouting and the timing of fungicide and insecticide applications — even herbicides.

“Growers are telling us that when they use this product, it minimizes the amount of recalibration or calibrating from either lot to lot or brand to brand,” Ozipko adds, “and that helps speed along the process. Many sunflower growers are fairly large acreage, so if you can minimize the amount of recalibration, that can help get the crop in the ground [more quickly].”

The Unistand-coated seed “looks like a sunflower seed, for the most part,” Ozipko relates. “It’s an oblong seed, not round; so you know it’s sunflower. But it does have a distinctive uniform shape.” The actual coating material is an organic, naturally occurring recipe — but not a clay base, he says. Seed treatment fungicide and insecticide products (e.g., CruiserMaxx® Sunflower) are applied to all the coated seeds (sometimes referred to as “pellets”).

Typically, the coated seeds — which in their raw condition would be size 4 — end up as a size 3. The Unistand coating option adds approximately 8% to the price of a bag of sunflower seed, on average.

For Todd Yackley, it’s a sound investment. “We don’t want to plant any sunflower seed without it. It really works,” he states. — Don Lilleboe

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