



AUTO-STEER WOWS OUR WORKERS

It's been a particularly unusual start to this year's growing season for me and for many producers here in western Bahia. The rains that normally start around the end of October never came. There were a few scarce showers around the first week of November, but we didn't receive our first widespread rain (chuva geral) until the 25th.

Our goal was to put corn in the ground around the middle of October, but we didn't start until Nov. 8. Even then, we planted in the dust. Corn is a pretty durable seed, so it can lie in the hot, dry soil waiting for rain for two weeks if need be.

We put in our corn and popcorn without any problems, and continued with our preparation for soybeans. Beans were started Nov. 25, and we planted a couple thousand acres before the rains came.

COTTON PLANTING started around Dec. 1, and has gone pretty well. Our cotton planting rig is a DB 72-ft. planter (24 row/36 in.) pulled by a John Deere 8430 equipped with auto-steer. With our long and flat fields, we are able to plant approximately 49-55 acres/hour. It's more of a challenge keeping the sprayers ahead of the planter with our current burndown package than it is to actually get the cotton in the ground.

When we set up the auto-steer, none of the workers had ever seen anything like it before and were skeptical about the outcome of the whole process. I took a few hours one day and grabbed my best tractor operator and began explaining to him how to run it: how to set his A and B points, create a straight line, etc. I tried to explain the concept of how

auto-steer works. I figured it would be a big stretch for his imagination, given the fact that this was the same guy who wears two rubber o-rings on his left pinky finger to protect him from lightning. And I was actually surprised how rapidly he was able to pick up on it and run it without any problems.

ALL OF US INVOLVED in the ag business continue to watch the markets and wonder when and where they will stop. Much will depend on how the Brazilian crops continue to progress over the next three months. Most of southern Brazil was dry early on, but the rain has re-established itself and things look positive.

Mato Grosso was also dry early in the season, which delayed planting just enough that many producers will not be able to double-crop corn this year, which will take a lot of corn out of supply. Bahia, compared

to last year, is behind. However, we normally get rain into late April, early May, so it doesn't really affect us much.

I will make an early prediction that Brazil's earlier projected soybean production of 59-60 million metric tons (mmt) will be a lot closer to 55 mmt. Even though Brazil has brought in some new ground this year, it won't yield well for its first few years. This will drop the overall average for beans.

Corn production is up in Brazil and many non-biotech and domestic buyers appear to be helping keep corn markets firm. Local cash price for corn today is \$6.80/bu.

Cotton continues to stay strong, all the way through the 2010 market year.

Everything is buying acres from everything down here. No one is sure how long this will all hold, but it sure is fun being in the game. **CSD**

► "I explained the concept of auto-steer and I was surprised how rapidly our tractor driver picked up on it," says Bruch.



PHOTO: TYLER BRUCH