

OUR FARM

By Tyler Bruch

Each Day Brings Surprises

Editor's Note: Next in a series from Iowa farmer Tyler Bruch whose family farms 10,500 acres in Bahia, Brazil.

Farming in Brazil has many parallels to Midwestern farming, and just as many differences.

Our harvest season started Feb. 28, beginning with our popcorn. I hoped that our popcorn would yield around 50 sacks per hectare (47 bu./acre). I'm pleased that our average yield on the 494 acres came in at 58 sacks per hectare (55 bu./acre). The price continues to hold around \$12-14/bu. I've had mixed feelings on the popcorn this year, but it gives us an early cash flow and we're able to double-crop edible beans behind it. I plan to expand our popcorn acres next year because it really improves our dollars per acre.

The crops continue to look good. Many farmers will start harvesting soybeans early this year (March 20). Many of the first soybeans appear to be very good, some early fields coming in at 50-plus sacks per hectare (44 bu./acre).

With the nearly perfect growing season this year, everybody should have fantastic beans. Cotton also continues to look good. The earlier planted cotton has set about 80% of its bolls and early projections would have it yielding well above the 250 arroba yield (or 2.7 bales/acre or 1,335 lbs. per acre). However, there is a lot of time left on cotton. The early planted cotton that looks so good right now may lose a lot of the bottom bolls on the plant due to boll-rot, a condition that happens when we get too much rain and the

lower cotton bolls rot off because they can't dry out.

February was an interesting month with nearly all of our investors making a trip to Bahia to check out the farming operation, crops and future growth opportunities. For many, this was their first trip to Brazil, and I could see the same excitement on many of their faces that I had when I first came here over four years ago.

It doesn't seem to matter what age or gender people are that come here; if they're involved in agribusiness of any sort, Bahia seems to get their adrenaline pumping.

We as a company (Global Ag Investments) looked at the opportunities for expansion and what direction we wanted to head. Our strategy from day one had been pretty straightforward. We want to rent ground on long-term contracts, keep our costs low and lock in profits by staying disciplined with our marketing plan.

By doing this we've created a vehicle that is efficient and profitable. We've decided to expand our operations here by several thousand additional acres in the coming year. The adjoining property to our farm that lies basically in one tract (4,700 hectares, or 11,609 acres) has become available to rent on contract for the next 5 years, as well as a couple of other farms nearby that would total about another additional 4,000 hectares (9,880 acres).

It's a lot of ground to pick up in one year, but we're continuing to build our management team in Brazil by adding more U.S. farm managers with agronomy degrees. By expanding our management we feel confident as we continue to take on more acres.

It seems like in farming you either get busy growing or get busy dying, because it seems there is no in between. ■

Last month things were pretty tense for a few moments when one of Bruch's crop dusters crashed while spraying cotton. "We were lucky that our pilot was able to walk away without injuries," he says. "The plane was not so lucky, but we were able to get it back flying after a week of much needed repairs."



PHOTO: TYLER BRUCH