

Innovative farmer

This Kansan does things a little different than most of his neighbors in Dickinson County

BY JOAN ISTAS, *Contributing Editor*

Innovative might best describe Don Phillips' farming operation near Hope, Kan.

Phillips, who operates a seed production and cleaning business in Dickinson County, Kan., is pulling into the field to plant wheat and milo as many of his neighbors are finishing seeding. The later planting fits better into his schedule and produces higher yields, says Phillips.

He is adamant about using liquid nitrogen instead of anhydrous on wheat. Then there's the portable seed cleaner he built on the bed of a semi-trailer that he says has been highly profitable.

Phillips has been farming all his life. He grew up on a dairy farm in Dickinson County, Kan., and, as a high school and college student, custom combined and rented several quarters of land. He began

farming full-time in 1980 after teaching vocational agriculture for two years. "I didn't like sitting behind a desk," is how he explains the change of careers.

Annually the central Kansas farmer plants 700 acres of wheat, 200 acres of soybeans, 100 acres of alfalfa, and 200 acres of milo in rotation.

"We rotate crops when we're allowed to do so by the government program," says Phillips. "We've almost been forced into continuous production to comply, but we can't do that anymore. We must do what the ground needs.

"Crop rotation is a necessity if we're going to raise seed. It keeps the varietal purities up and controls diseases and weeds. If not for crop rotation, cheat, buckwheat, and mustard would take over."

Phillips likes to practice a crop rotation of two years of wheat, one year of soybeans, and one year of alfalfa, milo, or sudan. He, however, admits some ground has been in wheat as long as four years, and soybeans, two years.

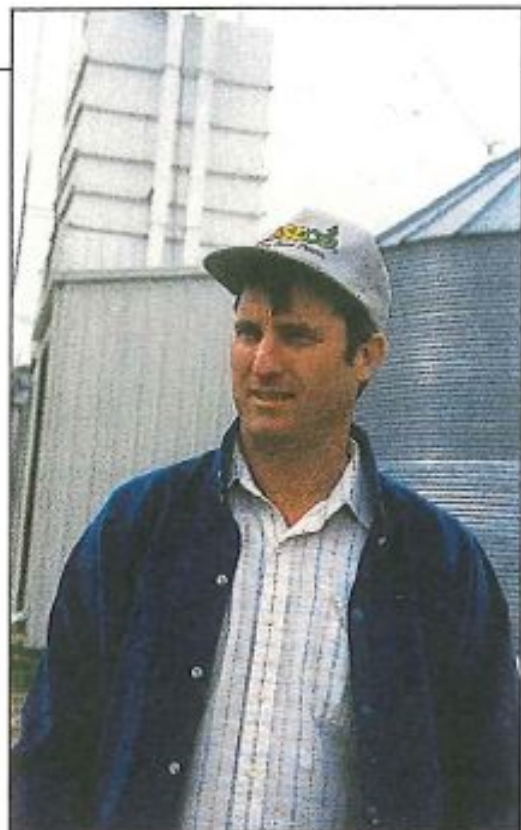
From the perspective of a seed grower, Phillips says wheat is easy to grow, and soybeans the most difficult crop to handle.

"To grow wheat, you just have to have Mother Nature cooperate with you. Wheat is the lazy man's crop," says Phillips.

Phillips begins planting wheat Oct. 1, the Hessian fly free date, and finishes five days later. Wheat of normal seed size is planted at a population of 50 lbs. per acre. Plant population is increased 15 lbs. per acre for each succeeding week the wheat is seeded. The later planted wheat does not stool



Don Phillips makes adjustments to the Great Plains drill he uses to seed CRP acres.



Adequate storage is important in keeping seed varieties separated.

as well, according to Phillips.

Phillips saves time and a trip across the field by applying up to 70 lbs. of liquid nitrogen and ¼ oz. of Glean per acre in one trip in February or March. About 35 lbs. of phosphate, according to soil test, is applied in the fall.

Glean is not used on 50 to 150 acres of wheat so sudan, soybeans, or milo can be double cropped following wheat harvest. The crop planted depends on the government program and moisture conditions.

Soybeans are inoculated and drilled in 7½-in. rows at a rate of two seeds per foot between May 25 and mid-June. Soybeans are planted as shallow as possible and still put in moisture. A Scepter-Sencor combination is applied for broad-



The portable seed cleaner is built on the bed of a semi-trailer.

leaf control and Lasso or Prowl to control grasses.

Soybeans are harvested at night at a moisture content of 12 percent to 14 percent to minimize crackage.

Milo is planted in mid-June so it fills during the late rains in September instead of the hot, dry month of August.

Phillips spends the months of July and August traveling the state cleaning seed for certified seed growers with his portable seed cleaner. He makes 10 to 12 stops during that time and annually cleans 200,000 bu. of seed for himself and others.

Phillips' system not only has a seed cleaner but a length grader, gravity table, seed treater, bagger, and generator. The length grader eliminates joint grass, buckwheat, cross cut, and cracked seeds. The gravity table separates seed by test weight using air and side-to-side movement.

The system is mounted on an 8 ft. x 53 ft. custom built semi-trailer and pulled by a semi-tractor truck.

"It's like taking a \$50,000 planter and pulling it in someone's yard and using it for a week," says

Phillips.

The innovator developed his first portable unit by rebuilding a junk cleaner he salvaged from an elevator.

"When I was using the old cleaner, I never stopped thinking how I could improve it," he says. It took a year and 4,000 hours for Phillips to develop the unit he uses today.

While his first unit cleaned 100 bu. of seed per hour, this one cleans 450 to 500 bu. per hour. The new one has all the secondary equipment necessary to compete in the seed business.

"Farmers are more conscious of quality. They realize high test weight and higher quality seed can be as important as fertilizer in improving yields," Phillips says.

"The seed business is a pretty competitive business. Sometimes quality is the only edge you have over your competitors."

Phillips further diversifies his operation with a 100-head registered Gelbvieh cow herd and backgrounding and finishing 50 steers annually.

Three full-time and three part-time people are employed by Phillips Seed Company.