

Ten Things to Check Before Planting Season

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1. Level the Planter. Check hitch height. Make sure the planter's tool bar is level (vertically) or running slightly up hill. When planters tip down, coulters run too deep and closing wheels run too shallow.
2. Check Bushings and Parallel Linkage. Worn bushings increase row bounce which increases seed bounce. Stand behind the row unit and wiggle it up and down and back and forth checking to make sure bushings are tight.
3. Drive System. Check every chain. Kinked and worn chains cause shock and vibration in the seed meter. Start with fresh, lubricated chains and check them daily. Include transmission chains, meter drive chains and insecticide box chains.
4. Calibrate Seed Meters. Calibrated meters which space seed drop can add six or more bushels per acre.
5. Double Disk Openers. Test to make sure there is good contact between the double disks. Slide a business card from the top down along the front of the disks until the card won't lower any further. Mark that spot with chalk. Then, take the card from the back and slide it forward until it stops. Mark that spot and measure the distance between the two marks. If marks are less than two inches, adjust or replace the disks.
6. Seed Tubes. Inspect seed tubes for wear at the bottom. Frequently, the tubes can develop a small dog ear flap on the left side of the seed tube. If so, replace them. Smooth seed delivery will pay dividends.
7. Closing Wheel System. For cool, moist planting conditions in heavy soils, take a look at running one spike wheel (15") on one side and one rubber wheel (13") on the other side. The spike wheel can help chop the sidewall improving fracturing and sealing in the tough soil conditions. For no-till, an even more aggressive approach may improve trench closing. Two 13" spike wheels with a drag chain provide the most aggressive action which may be needed for some soil situations. Make sure there is a good seed to soil contact.
8. Closing Wheel Alignment. With your planter setting on a concrete, pull ahead about five feet. Look at the mark left behind the planter by the double disk openers. The mark should run right down the centerline between closing wheels. If a closing wheel is running too close to the mark, adjust the closing wheels to bring it back to center.
9. Row Cleaners. With higher levels of residue and more corn on corn, almost any planter can benefit from well-adjusted row cleaners. Row cleaners sweep residue from the row, warming the soil around the seed trench, reducing seedling issues. Make sure row cleaners gently sweep residue – mostly, you don't want to move much soil, just residue. Watch the row cleaners running. They shouldn't turn constantly unless you want to move soil. They should gently turn and move residue, especially through areas of thick residue.
10. Improve seed germination with seed firmers.

SOURCE: Precision Planting, Inc.