

Photographs: Mike Boyatt



Father-and-son team Scott (right in both photos) and Jared Church, Catlin, Illinois, have their own base station for the AutoFarm guidance systems they use for planting, spraying, and tillage.



Picture-perfect planting

Scott and Jared Church garner sub-inch accuracy with guidance system

By Mike Holmberg

Having straight rows isn't just a goal for Scott and Jared Church – it's an expectation.

The Churches, a father-son team from Catlin, Illinois, are perfectionists and did not hesitate to buy an AutoFarm system to guide their planter and sprayer with sub-inch accuracy.

"The reason we went with AutoFarm was we wanted to georeference all the A-B lines and premark every border on every farm and store it in the on-board AutoFarm system computer," says Scott. "At the time, the computer was the only one that would accept all this information. Plus, we knew their accuracy level was the greatest."

The Churches used their first system on their 24-row planter and their 4700 Deere sprayer. Last spring, they bought a second one to use on their four-wheel-drive tractor.

"We felt with fuel prices and everything going through the roof, we can pull a 48-foot field cultivator and instead of overlapping 3 feet, we're overlapping about 4 inches and getting much more efficiency out of our big tractor," says Scott. "There's also a

payoff from reducing chemical application overlap with the sprayer."

They do not pair their guidance system with their combine, but that may soon change. They have a 35-foot platform on their Deere 9760 combine, which makes it a bit dicey for running the tractor and 1,100-bushel grain cart close while they are unloading. The AutoFarm system on the tractor helps, but a second system on the combine would make it easier yet.

Justifying the cost

"I doubt that we'll ever recoup the cost of the system in input savings. But I feel like it pays for itself in reduced driver fatigue," says Scott.

It also enables the Churches to replace employees with technology. "We'd rather do the work ourselves and make sure it's done right, rather than have employees out there and wonder if they're doing the job correctly," says Scott.

Guidance system prices have dropped since they were first introduced. The Churches invested more than \$50,000 in their two systems and have their own base station. Yet, this pales compared to spending \$35,000

to \$40,000 on salary and benefits each year for a full-time employee.

"We're farming 1,800 acres more now than when we had employees," says Scott. "The guidance system has allowed us to farm more with less manpower."

Their guidance system originally came from California where many high-dollar crops are grown.

"If they can get another four or five rows of tomatoes when they plant, they get a lot of value back," says Scott. "If we get another row or two of corn or soybeans, it doesn't amount to as much. But since we're perfectionists to start with, we didn't consider anything but sub-inch accuracy. I'm totally sold on the system and how it saves time, fuel, and fatigue." **SF**

Learn more

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