

Farmers have many decisions to make each year, but arguably the most important is what varieties or hybrids of seed they will plant. Genetic advancements in both corn and soybeans have progressed rapidly, offering more options than ever before.

“Traits are like an insurance policy,” said Dr. Dennis Garzonio, GROWMARK senior seed research and product manager. “They are there to protect the yield potential in the seed.”

Farmers should choose seed based on multi-year performance data, not just on what varieties performed well this year.

Because “Wisconsin weather” stretched as far south as Interstate 70 this year, Garzonio noted diseases, such as white mold, were evident in some fields for the first time in many years. Other pests, like rootworms, were less common in the cooler, wetter conditions.

“The past two years have not been normal growing years,” said Matt Hynes, FS Seed sales and marketing manager. “Farmers should look at multiple years of data in order to see how a certain hybrid or variety performs historically, unless they believe we will see a third year in a row of similar conditions.”

However, some varieties and hybrids are so new they are limited to a year or two of historical data. In these instances, Dr. Jeff Bunting, GROWMARK seed corn product manager, recommends looking at data from university or F.I.R.S.T. trials from a wide geography.

“Look at plot data from a little north of your area and a little south, because weather patterns were different,” he said. “Look for consistency when making your selections, how hybrid A performs compared to hybrid B in different regions.”

The ultimate goal of seed selection is maximizing productivity per acre, and that goal can only be met with a careful analysis of many factors. Soil type, fertility, tillage practices, and farmer preferences all play a role in finding the best seed for each field.

New genetics can boost a farmer’s bottom line, but only if they are part of the broader mix of variables unique to each operation.

“Farmers need to weigh the pros and cons of new trait technology carefully before deciding if it will truly help them reach their goals,” Hynes said. “It all comes down to working with a seed supplier who understands your entire operation and will recommend the right hybrids and varieties for your particular farm, not just the latest and greatest if they’re not the best for you.”