

Ploughing Through High Farm Costs

By: Stefanie Nagelschmitz

European growers are changing their ploughing practices and cutting costs in the process. A German expert claims that European farmers are managing their land and using their machinery in ways that counteract the rising costs. Adopting his tips and tricks could save Canadian farmers money too.

At this year's Innovative Farmers Association of Ontario (IFAO) conference held in London, Dr. Sven Dutzi from Amazone machinery in Germany, presented innovative tillage and planting technology. As land, labour and fuel costs rise in both Europe and Canada, Dutzi revealed foreign field practices that are saving farmers money.

“Cost is the reason so many farmers changed their systems or decreased their intensity,” says Dutzi. “If you decrease the intensity ... in the best case you can reduce [costs] to \$20 per acre.”

Dutzi explained that European farmers have severely reduced their intensity by not baling straw and moving to no-till. Instead of baling, he says, 75 per cent of German farmers chop straw and evenly spread the nutrients back on the field. Not only does this keep nutrients on the field, but it also cuts the synthetic fertilizer amounts that may be applied later.

European farmers are attracted to cost-saving field practices because of rising expenses including land costs up to \$600 or \$700 per acre. Canadian farmers are always willing to lower their input costs so Dutzi's tips are appealing to today's Canadian growers.

There are some subtle tricks to capturing the full savings of spreading chopped straw according to Dutzi. The length of the stubble left on the field is crucial. If stubble is too long it interferes with successful seeding and reduces the amount of chopped straw applied.

The cost savings don't end there. New machinery like the planters Dutzi helps test at Amazone allow for quick efficient seeding. In Europe, using discs can cut input costs and are more accurate than a plough. The right precision planter outfitted with a coulter can shoot seeds into the ground at higher speeds. He shocked the IFAO audience by saying 5 or 6 km per hour speeds are now being raised to 12.5 or 20 km per hour. Dutzi strongly believes in these machines' potential.

“It's high performance and low cost,” he says.

Fuel usage is lowering too. He claims that reducing tillage and replacing ploughs with a disc can save over 10L of fuel per hectare.

European crop farming is responding to higher fuel, land and labour costs with innovative cultivation practices. Dr. Sven Dutzi believes that there is merit – and money to be saved – for Canadian farmers willing to give these European practices a try.