

Agronomy center in the works

Written by Elizabeth Barrett

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More land for testing planted at Monsanto learning center.

A planter kicked up dust in a cornfield as it was pulled by a John Deere tractor under a warm, spring sky.

Planting was at full tilt last week at the Monsanto Water Utilization and Learning Center.

This year there are even more acres to plant in test plots as Monsanto begins development of an agronomy center.

Last Thursday, learning center manager Chandler Mazour confirmed that Monsanto bought land in December 2009 from the 96 Ranch that adjoins existing tests plots.

“We’re moving to a higher level of complexity with our new yield and stress biotech traits that will require more testing in the high plains,” he explained.

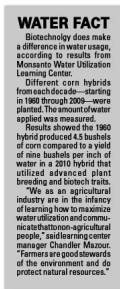
The new land is now tilled and ready. Irrigation and road infrastructure is underway.

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Four additional, seasonal employees have been hired to help with test plots.



Finances for potential buildings for the agronomy center and other infrastructure are being discussed, Mazour said.

Expansion, he said, ties into the company's system-based approach to development of more profitable and productive agriculture for farmers which includes emphasis on:

traditional plant breeding and native gene selection.

bio-tech additives such as a drought gene developed by Monsanto and expected to be on the market in 2012.

agronomics which includes things such as irrigation management and the practice of tillage and other water conservation practices specific to various production areas.

Use of these systems helps the company tailor development of traits to match a particular area, Mazour said.

For example, he said Monsanto's drought-tolerant seed will not be marketed in the eastern corn belt where rain is more plentiful.

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Likewise, agronomic practices differ from area to area.

Mazour noted that in some places, farmers spend money draining water from fields.

“Yield and stress biotechnology traits are still new so testing needs to be increased to bring better products—tailor made—from the fields,” he explained.

Monsanto is also racing to keep up globally.

With world population expected to exceed 9 billion by 2050, Mazour said farmers need to step up production.

That translates into a level of output over the next 40 years, he said, that will need to surpass what was produced in the last 10,000 years.

“That’s why we’re here,” Mazour said. “That’s why more intensive testing is needed to develop a cropping system to meet those needs.”

An agronomy center is a natural development, he said, as the learning center’s focus on water utilization and crops becomes increasingly intense.

“What we can learn here can be applied around the world,” Mazour said. “It’s exciting and a good thing for high-plains farmers.”

The water utilization and learning center opened south of Gothenburg last June.

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