

Pre-Spring Planter Maintenance

Eleven important things to check before spring:

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 chains cause shock and vibration in the meter. Start with fresh, lubricated chains and check them daily. Include transmission chains, meter drive chains and insecticide box chains.

4. Calibrate Corn Meters

Calibrated meters can add six or more bushels per acre. Send your meters and samples of your seed to our certified MeterMax representatives to gain additional percentages of accuracy.

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 it is less than two inches, reshim or replace the disks. In general, the disks must be more than 14.5" in diameter.

6. Seed Tubes

Inspect seed tubes for wear at the bottom. Frequently, the tubes will have a small dog ear flap on the left side of the seed tube. Replace them.

7. Closing Wheel System

Consider an alternative to rubber closing wheels. For cool, moist planting conditions, take a look at running one spike wheel (15") and one rubber wheel (13"). 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.

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 wicking and seedling blight. Make sure row cleaners gently sweep residue – you don't want to move soil, just residue. Watch the row cleaners running. They shouldn't turn constantly. They should gently turn sporadically, especially through areas of thick residue.

10. Improve Germination with Seed Firmers

Uniform germination adds, on average, six bushels an acre. Keeton Seed Firmers promote uniform germination by improving depth control and seed to soil contact. By using Keeton Seed Firmers to set seeds to the bottom of the seed trench, you increase the odds that seeds absorb moisture uniformly and emerge evenly.

11. Gauge Wheel Adjustment

Gauge wheels should be set so that when they are in the raised position there is a soft to medium amount of contact that occurs between the disk openers and the inner rubber of the gauge wheel. Once raised, spin the gauge wheel to feel the amount of contact.