

Colby farmer has high-oil recipe for sunflowers

Farmers always face the question of seed yield versus oil yield when selecting a hybrid sunflower variety.

No question, they love to get oil premiums, because most don't automatically count on it. It's a bonus. And when prices are in the high \$20 range, a 2 percent price premium for each point of oil over 40 percent can mean "real" money.

Going for high oil content does require some strategy. Some farmers shoot for that magic level near 50 percent. Reaching will get the attention of the sunflower industry. Thomas County farmer Tony Horinek was recently featured in *The Sunflower*, a national magazine produced by the National Sunflower Association.

Horinek, who farms near Colby, achieved an average oil content of 44 percent on his 1,500 acres of sunflower last fall. He had some at 46 percent, and overall had some of his best yields to date.

Horinek says he had good success attaining above-average oil percentages for several reasons, including seed selection, fertilizer tactics, crop-rotation strategy and planting date.

So what his recipe for high oil? First, it's about choosing the right high-oil-yielding hybrid. That means visiting with seed companies and looking at several years' of field test results.

"The hybrids available have improved so much over the past few years," he says. "We base our choice on experience, and we have determined our favorites. We accomplish this by experimenting on test plots."

Horinek also favors an early planting date for high oil. He likes to plant 'flow-ers around June 1 to 5.

The next factors are fertilizer strategy and crop rotation. Horinek said he has increased the fertilizer package over the

past couple of years, and it's really paid off. "We top-dress with 100 pounds of nitrogen in the late fall or winter and add 30 pounds of phosphorus at planting."

Horinek adds that his farm has been 100 percent no-till for years.

"So with that and no summer fallow," he said, "we're not afraid of too much nitrogen because there's little chance of leftover nutrients with an intense crop rotation that we follow here in Kansas."

They rotate sunflower after corn, he said. They employ a soil-sampling company to do grid sampling to produce recommendations for variable-rate application of fertilizer.

Moisture at just the right time is also a factor. Horinek says the best crops come when they have moisture early on and then additional rainfall later in the maturing stages when heads are filling. The timing of the water is the key. Water,

whether it's a well-timed rain or irrigation, at about the R-6 growth stage seems to have the greatest impact on oil content, he said.

There is also an issue of geography. Traditionally, he said, Northern Plains produces higher oil content. The National Sunflower Association has gathered oil content data for many years, and the more northerly areas of North Dakota and Minnesota tend to produce higher oil contents compared to areas farther south. This may have something to do with high heat and low moisture during seed fill. But Horinek says even with the high temperatures, the cool nights in Western Kansas seem to give the plants a chance to recover and minimize any possible damage. The deep root system of the sunflower is ideal in dry conditions, experienced in recent growing seasons. The plants' roots are able to go well beyond surface moisture

to get water.

High oils are likely a result of key factors coming together at the right time, Horinek said. It all starts with hybrid selection and adding into the mix the right planting date, fertilizer tactics and crop rotation. It comes down to applying best practices in all those areas to maximize oil – plus a lot of luck from Mother Nature.

Submitted by the National Sunflower Association, a farmer and industry organization working to improve the profitability of sunflower for all sectors. Farmer checkoff commissions in South Dakota, North Dakota, Minnesota, Kansas and Colorado make up the association's basic funding and governing structure. The association offices are headquartered in Mandan, N.D.

Bus driver has school for celebrities

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) – Nashville is the little-known capital of the bus touring business, with more than 80 percent of all U.S. touring bus companies leasing their fleets for North American music tours of all genres.

So it follows that there is a school in Nashville to teach students how to drive buses for celebrities.

The Celebrity Bus Drivers Academy is accepting applications for its April class, the third since Chip Huffman and partner Tandy Rice launched the first-of-its-kind driver's school in Nashville last year.

Huffman, a former celebrity bus company owner, said he and his partner want to help licensed charter bus and big-rig drivers break into the notoriously difficult-to-penetrate business.

"For 23 years, I ran Nitetrain (a bus company), and I must have fielded 20 calls a month asking,

'How do I run one of those star buses?' The answer is you have to have three years of experience. You know what the next question was. They couldn't get the experience."

The class is designed to give aspiring drivers the inside track on the rules of driving celebrities.

There are two key areas of study. The first is how to operate all the extras – the tracking systems, Internet, electric and sound equipment that are part of the celebrity road experience.

"They're the captain of that bus," Huffman told *The Tennessean* newspaper. "If they're on the road with Carrie Underwood for six months, they don't necessarily have to know how to fix everything, but they have to know how to take charge of that bus."

The second key component: "We try to teach them how to deal with the music business personality," Huffman said.

"They need to know what to say, what not to say, how to act. Your star doesn't want a star-struck driver who wants her autograph for his niece."

Huffman said drivers also have to understand they're most likely to experience the less-glamorous side of celebrity life.

"We tell them all the good parts and all the bad parts. By the time we finish talking about the lead singer who had too much to drink and threw up in the bathroom, and it's your job to clean it up I've lost some of them."

The job is not for everyone. You need to be calm, put your needs behind the performers', sleep at odd hours, stay away from home and family for weeks at a time.

But the rewards? "You get to go places and meet people you would never meet in your lifetime," Huffman said. "It is rewarding to watch a No. 1 artist make it up through the ranks,

do great shows, have huge crowds, and know you were literally part of getting them there."

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Taser fails to bring down Alaskan moose

FAIRBANKS, Alaska (AP) – A Taser may not be enough to stop a moose.

The *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner* reports that biologists with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game failed in their attempts to stun a cow moose to remove a rope around its neck that was used to rescue it from a river last month.

Biologists said the moose appeared to react only to the sound of the Taser going off, and it started running.

Biologists decided to leave the cow, which was accompanied by a calf. They said the rope is not hindering her ability to breathe, eat or walk – and may just fall off eventually.

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