Editor's column

By Laurence Tisdall

REAP, as most of you know, is involved in on-farm research. Our success so far has been due to the willingness of farmers to cooperate with us by letting us use their machinery and land for trials. The data from our plots is not always identical to that gathered by universities since the soil, weed and climatic conditions can vary greatly. Each farm is different and presents unique situations that need to be taken into account. It is for this reason that it would be advisable for producers to do a certain amount of their own research. A producer, for instance, may find with a little experimentation in applying less than the recommended rates of fertilizer or herbicides, etc... that his net profits are greater. Many farms are involved in some research but it usually consists of the planting of different cultivar types. Little work is being done in the area of fertilizer and/or herbicide rates. I think the reason farmers themselves haven't tried experimenting with these inputs is that they don't realize the possible economic benefit of such research. Doing one's own research may be as simple as turning a sprayer off for part of a field, using mechanical weed control and observing the effects. The results though not publishable in a scientific journal might just save hundreds of dollars. In point of fact, in this day and age farmers can ill afford not to do their own research. Since rates recommended by companies are meant to guarantee specific yields on average soil it is quite conceivable to over-apply fertilizer or herbicide on good soil. Take a field planted to one crop, treat most of it normally and then reduce the rates by had in one corner and see if any noticeable difference occurs and if so try a bigger area the next year and so on...

If you would like to help in organizing an experiment on your farm or are already doing some of your own research we would like to hear from you. Whether your efforts to this point have been a terrific success or a complete flop, no matter because either way your input might be responsable for saving other farmers hundreds of dollars