

7 Questions to ask your retailer at the start of a season



Even before seeds are in the ground, farmers need to have the tools in place to protect their crops' potential. A casual conversation with your retailer may introduce you to new products or solutions for specific weeds or disease threats. But thoughtful, ongoing conversations with them may help you build a stronger, holistic crop protection plan for your farm.

"Everything about an operation plays some part in the recommendations [retailers] make, whether you're talking herbicides, fungicides or insecticides," says Jeff Ellis, Ph.D. and Corteva Agriscience market development specialist for eastern Kansas and Missouri.

Let's take a closer look at how retailer conversations can help with crop protection – and the specific questions to explore with them.

1 How can I learn from last year?

Often, the best place to start your conversation with retailers is by examining the past growing season, says Nate Wyss, Corteva Agriscience market development specialist for Indiana and eastern Illinois. This can allow the retailer to see what is and isn't working in your existing crop protection plans, as well as spot patterns and potential trouble spots you may not have considered.

Wyss suggests that topics for discussion include:

- Was your last growing season successful? What pain points did you encounter?
- What historical trends continued on your farm (like recurring weed profiles or ongoing disease issues)?
- What new, unexpected challenges did you encounter in 2021?
- What can you do to adjust for those new challenges in this year's crop protection planning?

Once you've finished a post mortem on the past season, open up the discussion to ask about other trends retailers anticipate that might affect your growing season. Retailers may be aware of a particular weed or pest that's been trending around the area but that you haven't encountered yet, for example. By proactively incorporating a retailer's knowledge and wide experience into your planning, you'll be prepared with the right solutions.

2 How do I prepare a backup plan?

One area that's often overlooked is discussing how your crop protection strategy will adapt if you encounter unexpected challenges during the growing season. "The thing that gets missed the most, particularly as you're talking about the regional areas and different climatic conditions, is building out a plan B," says Jason Gibson, Corteva Agriscience market development specialist for Nebraska.

Gibson advises taking the time to discuss a crop protection "plan B" with your retailer if weather events or other factors frequently disrupt your schedule. For example, if your crop protection plan is built around early applications that become impossible due to wet fields, how can you work with your retailer to pivot the plan and implement other approaches in a wet year? Preparing for the unknown may help you better adapt to changes during the growing season with ease.

3 What trends should I be aware of during this growing season?

Conversations with retailers may give you faster insight into the latest news you need to know about crop protection. Often, retailers are the most reliable source of market breakthroughs, emerging trends or a general regional preview of the upcoming growing season.

Gibson suggests asking retailers, "Is there anything that would be normally unexpected, that I need to potentially expect going into this season? For example, are there any new diseases or new insect pressures that hadn't historically been there in the past that are starting to appear in the region that I need to be thinking about?"

4 What's one step I can take this year for long-term crop protection?

Understanding today's specific challenges and crop protection plans may allow for small changes or additions that can have a long-term impact on specific threats or reducing resistance issues for upcoming growing seasons.

Gibson explains how he would advise. "If [a farmer is] using, for example, a Sonic program today, and they're battling waterhemp and Palmer, is there one more product I might be able to add to that? Maybe an EverpreX that would not only provide as good or better control, but also increase the likelihood that, for a longer period of time, I'm not going to be battling resistant weeds," says Gibson.

5 How can I optimize my nutrient plan this year?

Don't forget nutrient management as you plan for a new season! Wyss suggests these key questions to frame the discussion:

- What investments should you be making for the long-term health of your land?
- Are you using the proper nutrient strategy for your crops?
- Should you consider adding a nitrogen stabilizer or nitrification inhibitor to your crop protection plan?
- Which fertilizers are a good fit for your soil types, crops and yield expectations?

Wyss also recommends discussing which application strategy and cultural practices can help maximize the ROI of your nutrient strategy.

6 What cultural practices will help my crop protection plans succeed?

Tap into your retailer's big-picture expertise and explore what overall recommendations they have for you to help make your growing season a success.

"Where a retailer can add a lot of value is helping coach growers through what they can do from a cultural perspective," says Gibson. Retailers may make specific recommendations such as moving up planting dates, exploring how aggressive your seeding rate is or looking at row width, for example. Often, these adjustments help improve crop protection efficacy.



7 How can I make the most of my crop protection budget?

Thinking ahead can help you save money on your crop protection plans — especially during prepay season.

Ellis notes that growers who talk to retailers during prepay season are often able to take advantage of the year's most competitive pricing on herbicides, insecticides, fungicides and nitrogen stabilizers. Determine what you'll need throughout the year to maximize your crop protection budget.

It's also helpful to revisit the ROI of each specific treatment you're buying. Ellis advises growers to ask how much each solution will increase their bottom line. "That's probably a question you should ask every year," he notes. "Will this add more yield? And is the cost of the application versus the added yield bump really worth the investment?"

Finally, Ellis suggests that you may want to seek an outside opinion on a specific solution or new technology. University extension staff and researchers can be a great resource, as can independent crop consultants, says Ellis.

Consider your retailer an invaluable resource for crop protection planning

Retailers are an invaluable source of information about what's happening in the crop protection market and how specific solutions and technologies can apply to your unique growing operation.

By asking the right questions of your retailer before you act on past strategies, make purchases or even plant your first crop of the season, you may be able to set your crop up for a better growing season and improved long-term health.



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