



## Identifying the Right Hybrids for Seed Company Success



Over the past decade, regional seed companies have enjoyed strong growth in the corn market. It's an area of opportunity that Ron Nelson, Business Manager, Thurston Genetics, finds ripe with ongoing potential. To support regional seed brands in their continued growth, Thurston brings forward the latest trait technologies, such as PowerCore® Enlist® corn, in high-performing genetics. The goal is to give these brands total confidence in the genetics they present to their farmer customers. "Our success is the success of all the brands we license to," Nelson said.

Thurston Genetics celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2023, and Nelson was one of its first three employees. As the industry started undergoing major changes in the late 1990s, the company was acquired by BASF in 2001. Nelson acknowledges it may seem like an unusual alliance, but it has worked very well for both parties. "BASF doesn't own any corn germplasm or traits. This allows us to be a neutral player." Thurston Genetics essentially operates as the "corn asset people" for BASF, Nelson said. The company is well-known and highly respected in corn genetics licensing throughout North America.



**Ron Nelson**

Business Manager  
Thurston Genetics

Thurston Genetics' long history is an important part of how they evaluate hybrids, building on a large database and watching for trends. "We've been in the business so long, we have a bell curve," Nelson explained. "We have new products on the way in, older products on the way out and the ones in the middle. We're always looking for new and better hybrids to upgrade our product offerings." We test and evaluate hundreds of inbreds and hybrids annually across an expansive network of locations, looking at everything from the earliest-maturing hybrids in Canada to the latest-maturing ones in the Deep South.



## Vetting hybrids from every angle

Nelson said Thurston Genetics acts much like a product manager for the seed brands they serve, the kind of role that's only possible with a highly experienced team. "Our genetic sales managers were product managers with retail brands prior to joining our team," Nelson explained. "They have more than 180 years combined of corn industry experience and have worked here at Thurston Genetics for 11 years on average." Nelson said with this level of knowledge and skill, they're able to deliver the highest level of confidence and support to their customers. "Our seed brand customers tell us their needs and ask what we have in our arsenal." With all of their testing and data, Thurston Genetics is able to vet the pedigree of hybrids and help companies know where to place them. "It's how we prove it's worthy of being planted in western Iowa, or wherever we've recommended." It's a responsibility Nelson takes to heart. "Many of these are family-owned companies. They take pride in what they do and in their local reputation. They're doing business with their neighbors. If you're a small seed company and a hybrid fails, that could put you out of business." Nelson continued, "That's the buffer we bring to our customers. We've looked at these hybrids, we know the chinks in the armor. We feel comfortable we'll have a repeat customer and so will they."

Thurston Genetics probes for the possible vulnerabilities in all the hybrids they evaluate. "In addition to yield, our team focuses on the strengths and the weaknesses of the products. Knowing the weaknesses of the genetics allows us to provide better hybrid positioning information to our customers that will hopefully increase their level of success with their customers," Nelson said. "We're looking for: What's the negative of that product? If you're selling corn in the Dakotas, it better stand, it better have good greensnap tolerance, it better have good Goss's wilt tolerance. Some of that might be more important than yield." This is where Thurston Genetics' experience comes into play. "Anybody can look at a computer and say X is the highest-yielding hybrid," Nelson said, "but it takes people on the ground saying, 'What are the risks in planting Hybrid A in a specific environment versus Hybrid B? Hybrid A may have more yield potential, but brings a higher agronomic risk.'"

## Creating competitive opportunity

Nelson is enthusiastic about the number of choices independent seed companies have today from germplasm developers like Corteva Agriscience. "The opportunity is there for our customers to broaden their portfolio with genetics and traits to keep them competitive at the farmgate," Nelson said. One of the options he sees as a big advantage for independent seed companies is PowerCore Enlist corn. "What's great for seed companies is this is an alternative for their above-ground insect protection and herbicide portfolio, and along with that comes some novel genetics. This is another tool in their arsenal to keep independent seed companies in the game. It's a big step forward for a lot of our customers," he said. "Independent seed companies have probably never had so much opportunity on their plate as they do now."

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