



PETERSON CORN GENETICS

Keeping Independent Seed Companies Competitive

Just one month after getting into the licensing business, Kevin Cavanaugh knew he wanted Peterson Corn Genetics, LLC to license hybrids from Corteva Agriscience. Dr. Cavanaugh has a PhD in corn genetics — “That’s the only thing I know about,” he joked — and is President of Peterson Corn Genetics (PCG). When he learned Corteva would be out-licensing some of the industry’s top genetics, he was more than ready to jump on board. “To be on the leading edge, bring new technology to the marketplace and more important, a new genetic lineup to independent seed companies, was a tremendous opportunity,” he said.



Kevin Cavanaugh

President
Peterson Corn Genetics

As a fully independent licensing agent, PCG licenses genetics from all of the major germplasm developers except Bayer Crop Science. “We don’t have any skin in the game for one supplier or another,” Cavanaugh explained. “Our customers are looking for performance.”

Evaluating hybrids

Every hybrid PCG considers — whether from Corteva or another supplier — goes through the company’s own rigorous testing protocol called the Cutting Edge Program. Hybrids are divided into groups by maturity and tested in locations



across the Corn Belt. “It gives us a great feel for: Does this work in highly productive soils or low-productivity soils? Is it better in high-nitrogen or low-nitrogen conditions? Does it have a good disease package?” Cavanaugh said.

Not every hybrid makes the cut. “We don’t deploy everything Corteva gives us. We’ll test them for two years before we deploy to our customers. Our genetic advisors are looking at those products, how they perform, where they perform well — or not — so we can advise customers on where to place them.”

Crafting a winning lineup

An open line of communication between PCG and the Corteva licensing team helps ensure more hybrids coming through the Corteva pipeline will pass muster. “We talk with Corteva multiple times a week,” Cavanaugh said. “We correspond and we’ll tell them, ‘We like this hybrid that does X. Bring us more with these parents because they are performing this way,’” Cavanaugh said. “Jim [Buelte] finds them in the big testing funnel that is Corteva and tries to bring them to us.”

When it comes to providing a great lineup to customers, PCG also looks beyond yield to genetic diversity. Cavanaugh explained, “Two years ago, we had the wettest June in history. Last year, it was one of the driest in history. Weather is variable. Disease and insect infestations change over time. That same hybrid may not come to the top two years in a row. Farmers know that. Seed companies know that. And Corteva has a very broad genetic base.” He continued, “It’s not one male crossed with eight females to make eight hybrids. There’s a lot of diversity. The products we deploy today have very strong roots, a strong health package and these plants are more moderately statured. Corteva has worked hard to change the architecture of the plant, so you can see these plants will stand against strong winds.”

Improving with every generation

With PCG now into the third generation of products from Corteva, Cavanaugh has been excited to see the hybrid performance continue to improve. “You can see those products get better and better and better. That’s what you want to show your customers. That you’re not just a flash in the pan. You have a pipeline of material coming.”

“Our customers are
looking for performance.”



Peterson Corn Genetics has taken note of deeper kernels in some Corteva hybrids, which contributes to yield. This particular hybrid has been a showstopper at the company's field days this year.

PCG has also noticed a significant change in kernel depth in Corteva hybrids. "Kernel depth is a big attribute in yield," Cavanaugh noted. "In the first deployment class, we had a particular PowerCore® Enlist® corn hybrid we nicknamed 'The Money Maker.' On our third deployment, we received a white cob female cross with the male inbred of the Money Maker, and it produced incredible kernel depth." This hybrid has become a bit of a showstopper at PCG field days. "It's fun to bring customers into the show plot, break the ear and let them see it. At our central Indiana test plot, there were almost no ears left on the plant because everyone was breaking the ear to show it off," Cavanaugh said.

Cavanaugh also remarked on the advantages of Corteva hybrids in seed production. One female inbred he was particularly excited about produced 135 bu/A, well above industry averages for seed production. "And it's not a fluke," Cavanaugh explained. "The Corteva male plants have huge, bushy tassels and shed pollen for a long time, and the female plants tend to have very high yields." Cavanaugh noted that for seed companies, a bump in production yield can be a real boon to profitability. "If you're planning for 70 bushels an acre and get 95, that's a \$10 swing in cost of goods for independent seed companies."

Leading trait technologies

These high-performance hybrids also come with the latest in traits, including PowerCore® Enlist® trait technology. This year, PCG was able to offer a full portfolio of PowerCore Enlist corn in maturities from 75 to 116 days. "We're excited about the portfolio and our customers are, too," Cavanaugh said. "They love the trait technology, the agronomics and the performance of the products." Cavanaugh and his team are excited to help customers learn more about PowerCore Enlist trait technology so they can take full advantage of it. "To be able to control weeds post with FOP herbicides is a huge advantage. Most people haven't had the opportunity to do that in the past," he said. "The additional MOA for corn borer is important for resistance, too."

Valuing independence

Cavanaugh has seen a lot of changes across his career in seed but has always been drawn to working with independent seed companies – an area where he sees plenty of opportunity for growth. "Every independent seed company is different. Different marketplace approach, different outlook on life. It's fun to work with them and help them be successful," he said. "We're fortunate that Corteva moved to an out-licensing model. They have a lot of depth and breadth to their germplasm development program, so it can feed lots of channels simultaneously. This means we're not selling the same product other companies are selling. That gives our independent seed company customers something unique and different to offer and we can help these guys become more competitive."

Learn more about Peterson Corn Genetics, LLC at PCGcorn.com



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