



# Rescue Nitrogen

When you're about out of time.

In spite of being able to start sidedressing in smaller corn and being able to run larger applicators faster throughout the season, a lot of growers are still concerned that they might not be able to finish the job, especially if June turns really wet. It's a valid concern, especially because many of them are running a lot more acres than they used to. And because June has turned really wet in several recent years, as it did last year across the southern Corn Belt.

Offsetting that, to some extent, is the ever-increasing number of high-clearance applicators owned by farmers. Even if these applicators don't have nitrogen bars like the one at right, they can still be used to apply liquid nitrogen between the rows with drop hoses or solid-stream nozzles. You can spray until the wind picks up, then sidedress nitrogen in tall corn.

Mei Gerber, Versailles, Missouri, was able to sidedress most of his fields last year. But wet conditions kept him out of the field shown above until the corn was too tall for his tractor and applicator. The corn had some starter and some poultry manure, but it needed more nitrogen.

His fallback position was to have a Spra-Coupe apply liquid nitrogen with solid-stream nozzles when the corn was past waist high. Because of the size of the corn, some of the nitrogen ended up on the leaves. "I think we had some damage," says Gerber. But he is sure it was better than not getting any additional nitrogen on that field.

Some growers now apply small amounts of nitrogen early to carry the crop for a few weeks, then they apply the rest with

high-clearance applicators outfitted with nitrogen sensors like the ones on the bar in the photo at right.

Even fields that received a lot of nitrogen before planting can run short. "My rule of thumb is that more than 16 inches of rain from April through June – or more than a foot in May and June – will lead to nitrogen deficiency problems in a substantial number of cornfields," says University of Missouri agronomist Peter Scharf. □

University of Missouri research agronomist Kelly Nelson developed this chart to show which sources of nitrogen can be used at different growth stages of corn.

