



A fertilizer expert by trade and a rancher for the love of it, this producer advises friends and neighbors to take advantage of the opportunities Mother Nature gives you.



AS JERRY YOUNG STROLLS WITH HIS WIFE, NATALIE, among their herd of

Angus cattle, he's reminded of the advice given to him by a friend and fellow farmer.

"His comment was, 'Look down the road at a neighbor who you think of as a good farmer, and do what he is doing,'" Young recalls. "That's pretty simple advice, but I think it's still pretty sound counsel. There are lots of things out there right now in agriculture that are taking guys to a new level, including precision agriculture, new seed and chemical technology, etc. Unfortunately, I think it also causes some farmers to lose sight of the basics, which I see as sticking with the fundamentals and taking advantage of the opportunities."

Young has had the opportunity to test that theory from two perspectives. He's built a successful cattle operation on approximately 350 acres near Bosworth, Mo., and has spent the past 30 years working in management for Missouri agribusiness. Most recently he was assistant general manager of AGRIServices of Brunswick (ASB), one of the state's largest wholesale and retail fertilizer outlets. He left ASB this past June. Prior to that, he spent 11 years as general manager of the Mendon Feed and Grain in Mendon, Mo.

"If you look at the last 2 or 3 years, we've seen higher input costs and a lot more volatility in the fertilizer market," he explains. "And this has caused some producers to try to outguess the market or wait for the price to go down over the winter. My advice was always, 'Get your potassium and phosphate on in the fall,' and I usually recommended they put anhydrous

ammonia down in the fall, as well.

"I saw too many cases in which the guys who decided to wait got caught by spring weather that held them out of the fields. By the time they got fertilizer on, their corn planting was already delayed. Two years ago, some farmers didn't even get all of their corn planted," he notes.

Young says he was equally surprised at the number of farmers who would ignore recommendations, even when they were based on soil grid sampling.

"Inevitably, when the recommendation called for quite a bit of fertilizer, which is getting rather expensive, we'd have guys who tried to tweak it," he explains. "And I understand, but to me, it goes back to the fundamentals. Keep your fertility levels where they need to be and take advantage of the opportunities that Mother Nature gives you after harvest, so you can do what you do best when planting time arrives."

Young says he believes the same thing is true in livestock production, comparing corn ground fertility to livestock health.

"We make sure our cows get the proper minerals and nutrition to produce and grow a calf, and we creep feed our calves based on season, cow condition, pasture condition, etc.," he relates, noting that calves are fully weaned at 45 days. "But we make those decisions based on what is fundamental. I can't control the market, but I want my commodity, which, in this case is my calves, to be in the best condition possible."

Young has the same feeling toward hay fields and pasture. "When ASB embraced the precision side of farming, I figured there wasn't any better place to start than my own farm," he says, noting that he