

Mazour: Monsanto Learning Center mission simple, implementation is not

Written by Elizabeth Barrett

Thursday, 03 December 2009 21:27 - Last Updated Friday, 04 December 2009 14:52



Manager addresses GIC stockholders at annual gathering.

In a nutshell, the mission of Monsanto's Water Utilization and Learning Center is to help farmers increase yields while using less inputs.

After Gothenburg Improvement Company stockholders had eaten lunch at the learning center Nov. 18 during their annual meeting, Chandler Mazour told them the mission statement was simple.

"But it's also the most complicated challenge I've ever had to deal with in my life," said Mazour who is learning center manager.

That's because the systems-based approach involves biotechnology—the genetic engineering of plants—in combination with plant breeding and agronomic systems to produce certain benefits to farmers such as tolerance of drought.

The agronomic part of the approach is also part of the approach and includes such things as management of irrigation and treatment of seed.

In addition to helping plan the learning center and a separate breeding station building, Mazour and his team also planted more than 80 demonstrations last spring to showcase different parts of the cropping system for visitors touring the center.

"Now we're wrapping up harvest," he said.

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Mazour laughed when he told about the building of the water utilization center during a year of ample rainfall—an average of 23 inches during the growing season to be exact compared to the normal average of 11 inches yearly—to reach maximum yields.

“Water touches us all in different ways,” he said, noting that many people don’t realize how corn goes into cattle and beef is then eaten by consumers.

Tours of the center and demonstration plots began in June and lasted through October. Mazour said 3,400 visitors walked through the learning center doors.

Key audiences included: farmers, crop consultants, seed sellers, Monsanto and university officials, water policy makers, collaborators and youth involved in agriculture.

Visitors, who included media and trade groups, came from all over the United States and also from Japan, Switzerland, Spain, Sri Lanka and Kenya.

Feedback the center received from visitors has been favorable, Mazour said, noting that field tours rated high.

“The learning center gives our seedsmen credibility because it shows there’s scientific rigor behind what they sell,” he said, adding that sharing the Monsanto’s story shows that the company is making a difference in the High Plains. “We are very much committed to our commitment to sustainable yield which is to help farmers double yields in corn and soybeans by 2030 using less inputs such as water and fertilizer.”

The center is already booking tours for the 2010 season which begins in January. It picks up when crops are planted again.

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