

Welcome back to The Earfull for the 2026 growing season. As planters roll out of storage and seed deliveries arrive across the Renk sales area, the focus shifts to the decisions that set up this year's crop for success. Throughout 2026, The Earfull will bring you timely, practical agronomy insights: planting and stand establishment, in-season scouting, disease and pest management, silage and harvest strategy, and year-end research results from Renk's research program. Each edition is designed to support you with field-level agronomy that drives better decisions all season long.

This week, we're covering two fundamentals that protect yield before planting even begins: planter setup that delivers uniform emergence and a two-pass weed control strategy that keeps fields clean when it matters most.

Planter Prep That Protects Uniform Emergence

Seed deliveries are arriving and planters are coming out of winter storage across the Upper Midwest. This is the narrow window when setup work done in the shop determines stand quality for the entire season.

Uneven stands at V3 or V4 rarely start with bad weather. They start with inconsistent depth, worn components or calibration checks that got skipped in the rush to get rolling. Clean, uniform emergence comes from intentional preparation done now—before field conditions force compromise or time runs out.

Planter Prep That Protects Uniform Emergence

Gauge Wheels – Worn gauge wheels throw off depth settings across the toolbar. Inside-edge wear changes wheel diameter enough to vary planting depth by a quarter inch or more—the difference between seed placed in moisture and seed sitting in dust. Check every gauge wheel for wobble and uneven wear. Replace any that don't spin smoothly or show visible damage before the planter enters the field.

Seed Firmers – Firmers press seed into firm contact with the trench bottom. When they crack or lose flexibility, seeds end up resting on loose soil instead of moisture. That creates delayed emergence and weak early root systems. Pull firmers off the planter and flex them by hand. Brittle or stiff firmers should be replaced now, not after the first field is planted.

Vacuum Systems – Consistent vacuum pressure keeps seed singulation and spacing uniform. Low or inconsistent pressure creates doubles, skips, and uneven emergence that shows up as variable stands and uneven maturity later in the season. Test vacuum levels on every row unit and check hoses, fittings, and meter housings for air leaks. Inspect seed discs for wear or damage and clean them thoroughly before use.

Drive Calibration – Spacing accuracy depends on calibration, whether the planter uses chains, belts or electric drives. Run the planter on flat ground, measure actual seed drop over a known distance, and compare it to monitor readings. If they don't match, recalibrate before the first acre goes in. This step takes fifteen minutes and prevents weeks of stand problems later.

Why This Work Pays All Season

Planter prep is one of those jobs that rarely gets attention once the season is underway, but it shows up later in the form of uneven stands, delayed emergence, and harder agronomic decisions down the road. A few extra checks in the shop now can save a lot of second-guessing once the crop is up.

Uniform emergence doesn't happen by accident. It happens because someone took the time to set the planter up correctly before the first pass across the field. As the 2026 season gets rolling, these early details are where strong stands begin—and in the weeks ahead, The Earfull will keep building on that foundation with timely scouting insights, disease alerts, and practical management ideas from across Renk country.

Early Weed Control Starts With a Two-Pass Plan

The most effective weed management programs use a two-pass strategy: pre-emergence residual followed by timely post-emergence cleanup. That approach protects the crop during the narrow window when weed competition does the most damage—and it works more consistently than either pass alone.

Pre-Emergence: Start Clean, Stay Clean

Soil-applied residuals create a barrier that stops weed seeds from germinating or establishing roots. Applied at or before planting, residuals keep fields clean through emergence and early vegetative growth when corn and soybeans are most vulnerable to competition. Layering multiple active ingredients with overlapping persistence windows reduces early flushes of waterhemp, giant ragweed, and other tough species, giving the crop time to establish roots and build leaf area without interference.

Post-Emergence: Finish What Residuals Started

No residual is perfect. Breakthrough weeds, uneven moisture, and late-germinating escapes mean even well-protected fields benefit from timely post applications. Post herbicides clean up what residuals missed and extend control through canopy closure. Timing matters—post applications work best when weeds are small (under four inches) and the crop is actively growing. Waiting too long reduces effectiveness and allows weeds to compete during the window when yield loss is hardest to recover.

A two-pass system gives flexibility to adjust for field conditions, weather delays, and resistance management. It also reduces pressure on any single application to be perfect.

Match Herbicides to Trait Platforms

Herbicide programs must match the trait package in the bag. Enlist®, Roundup Ready 2 Xtend®, LibertyLink®, and other platforms each have labeled chemistries designed to work safely with those genetics. Verify traits on every field before herbicides go in the tank. Trait stewardship protects the crop, the technology, and the investment.

Bottom Line

A two-pass plan—residual at planting, post-emergence cleanup when weeds are small—protects the crop when it matters most. Fields that stay clean from planting through V6 in corn or canopy closure in soybeans perform better all season. That advantage comes from planning both passes now, before planting begins.

Sources and References

Planter setup guidance informed by Iowa State University Extension research on planting depth and emergence uniformity, University of Wisconsin Extension corn agronomy resources, and agronomic best practices for seed metering, gauge wheel maintenance, and drive calibration. Weed management timing and critical competition periods based on Iowa State University Extension Integrated Crop Management publications, University of Wisconsin Extension Crops and Soils guidance, and Purdue University Extension research on early-season weed interference in corn and soybeans. Herbicide application recommendations should always follow product labels and trait platform stewardship requirements.