What to Check Before You Plant: A Practical Pre-Season Input List for Commercial Farmers

Start the Season With the Right Foundation

The weeks before planting set the tone for the entire growing cycle. Whether you grow maize, wheat, soybeans or vegetables, the inputs you secure and the choices you make now affect yield potential, crop health and your bottom line. A structured approach to pre-season planning helps avoid last-minute shortages, misapplied products and costly mistakes.

This article walks through the main input categories worth reviewing before the planter hits the field. Each point includes the practical reason it matters, so you can decide where to focus your time and budget.

Seed Quality and Variety Selection

The seed you put in the ground is the single most important input. Even the best fertiliser program and perfect weather cannot fix poor genetics or low viability. Start by confirming the seed you intend to plant is suited to your region, soil type and expected rainfall pattern. Check the days-to-maturity against your typical growing season length, and consider disease resistance ratings for local pathogens.

Certified agricultural seeds carry a label that guarantees a minimum germination percentage, varietal purity and freedom from certain weed seeds. That label is not just paperwork, it represents a standard that commercial growers rely on for consistency. When you purchase certified seed, you reduce the risk of introducing volunteer plants or low-vigour batches that thin out unevenly. This is especially important for crops where plant population directly affects yield, such as maize or sunflowers.

Check the treatment status as well. Some seed comes pre-treated with fungicide or insecticide, which saves time and ensures even coverage. If you plan to apply your own treatments, verify compatibility with your planter equipment and any inoculants you might use.

Fertiliser Planning and Soil Fertility

Soil fertility is not a fixed condition. It shifts with every crop removal, every rain event and every season of tillage. A soil test taken within the past twelve months gives you a starting point. Without recent test results, you are guessing on application rates and ratios.

Once you have the test report, compare the recommended nutrient levels against what you plan to apply. A typical fertiliser blend for a cereal crop might include nitrogen, phosphorus and

potassium, but secondary nutrients such as sulphur, zinc or boron often limit yield in certain soils. The blend you choose should match both the crop's uptake pattern and the soil's existing supply.

Consider timing as well. Some nutrients need to be available at planting, while others are better applied as side-dress or top-dress later in the season. Pre-season is the time to order the right products, not just the cheapest bag of granular fertiliser. Confirm delivery dates so the product arrives before you need to spread, not after the field is already planted.

Sisanda Agri offers a range of fertiliser options that can be matched to your soil test results. Their team can help you interpret the numbers and select a blend that fits your crop and budget. Having the fertiliser on hand before the rush starts means one less variable to worry about when the weather turns favourable.

Crop Protection Products and Application Planning

Weeds, insects and diseases do not wait for a convenient time. Pre-season is the moment to review your crop protection strategy for the coming cycle. Start with the previous season's records. Which problem organisms showed up? Which products worked, and which ones gave disappointing control? Rotating active ingredients helps delay resistance, so avoid buying the same chemistry you used last year unless you have a specific reason.

Check the labels on any stored chemicals. Some products degrade over time, especially if they have been exposed to temperature swings or moisture. Expired or degraded product may not perform as expected, and applying it wastes time and money. This is also a good time to confirm that your sprayer equipment is calibrated and in good working order. Nozzle wear, pump pressure and tank agitation affect how evenly a product reaches the target.

Pre-emergence herbicides need to go down before the crop emerges or very soon after, so having them on hand early matters. Post-emergence products can be ordered later, but knowing what you might need avoids the scramble when a pest outbreak arrives. Consider tank-mix compatibility as well. Some combinations require specific mixing order or risk settling out in the tank.

Seed Treatment and Inoculants

For legume crops such as soybeans, cowpeas or lucerne, the right inoculant can make the difference between a crop that fixes its own nitrogen and one that needs heavy fertiliser applications. Inoculants contain live bacteria, so they have a shelf life and need careful storage. Check the expiry date and confirm the product matches your seed variety.

If you are using treated seed, verify that the treatment does not conflict with the inoculant. Some fungicide seed treatments can harm the beneficial bacteria in an inoculant. In that case, you may need a specialised inoculant formulation or a different timing for application.

Seed treatments themselves deserve a review. The standard dressing may not cover the spectrum of soil-borne diseases in your field. Talk to your supplier about whether an additional treatment or a different product is worth the cost, given your history of seedling diseases.

Fuel, Lubricants and Equipment Readiness

Inputs are not limited to what goes into the soil. Planting season is a mechanical operation, and a broken planter or a tractor that will not start can delay planting past the optimal window. Before the season starts, check fuel levels, lubricants and hydraulic fluids. Fill storage tanks so you are not running to town during a narrow weather window.

Test the planter on a hard surface before it reaches the field. Check seed metering units, disc openers and depth control wheels. Even a small variation in planting depth can cause uneven emergence that reduces yield. Calibrate the seed monitor if your planter uses one, and confirm that the monitor reads accurately across the range of speeds you expect to use.

Delivery Logistics and Volume Planning

Inputs are heavy and bulky. Fertiliser and seed take up space, and delivery vehicles need access even when fields are wet. Pre-season is the time to confirm delivery schedules with your suppliers. If you order a full truckload of fertiliser, ask about delivery volume minimums and lead times. A delay of a few days can throw off the entire planting schedule.

Check storage capacity as well. Do you have enough covered space to keep seed dry and chemicals secure? Moisture and temperature fluctuations degrade seed quality and chemical stability. If storage is tight, consider staging deliveries so products arrive closer to when you need them.

Sisanda Agri understands these logistical challenges and works with growers to coordinate delivery timing. Their team can help plan the flow of inputs so you are not stuck with too much product too early or too little when the planter starts rolling.

Keeping Records and Building a Baseline

Good pre-season planning also involves good record-keeping. Note the batch numbers of every seed lot, the analysis of every fertiliser load and the product names and application rates of every chemical. These records become valuable when you evaluate the season later. They also help in case of a crop failure or a quality dispute with a supplier.

Take soil samples from the same spots you sampled last year. Consistent sampling locations let you track changes in soil fertility over time. That trend data is more useful than a single snapshot, because it shows whether your fertility program is building the soil or mining it.

Final Review Before the Planter Moves

By the time the soil is fit and the forecast looks good, there should be no major surprises left. The seed is on hand, the fertiliser is spread or ready to go, the crop protection products are in the shed and the equipment is serviced and calibrated. The only thing left is to watch the sky and start planting when the conditions are right.

A thorough pre-season checklist does not guarantee a perfect season, but it removes the avoidable mistakes that turn a good year into a frustrating one. Take the time now, while the pace is slower, to confirm every input and every plan. That preparation pays off when the season is in full swing.