

Ask Mechanic Mike!

Keeping It All in Perspective During a Challenging Spring

It's late April and raining sideways here in the Boistfort Valley. Western Washington is famous for its rainfall, and I have farmed most of my adult life in areas with between 50 and 80 inches (that's right 80) of annual rainfall. If you are from the east side of the state, please understand that we on the west side picture you over there working banker's hours, and sipping Piña Coladas on the porch, unable to imagine a world full of mummy berry, damping off and powdery mildew.



If, however, these things sound familiar, and if you are behind because of rain, if you have a greenhouse full of transplants and a barn full of fertilizer and there is no way you can get out there, and, even if you did or could there is no way that there is enough daylight to get everything done, let alone be a parent or a partner, I get it. You can be a good farmer with good equipment and a vast body of knowledge, but at the end of the day you answer straight to the top in terms of getting your work done.



Nileisms on plowing: "If you can't plow straight, plow at the end of the day and disk first thing in the morning; that will limit your exposure to the neighbors."

I know the feeling of being behind, I know the guilt and anxiety about delivering to a group of customers that have already paid, and I know the pressure associated with meeting wholesale expectations. I also know how it feels to watch a perfectly good plan come off the rails because of weather or equipment failure or what we had come to refer to as the disaster du jour. I have always hated to suffer alone and tend to reach out to others to gain perspective and find relief. One man in particular, our field lead for a year, was especially adept at making me feel better. What follows are

some words of wisdom from Nile. Some are original; many are second hand from other farmers in the area, and some you may recognize from other places in history. For your enjoyment a list of what we came to refer to as Nileisms follows:

- On the idea that last season was better: "Farming is like child birth, you forget the pain; it's the only way you can do it year after year."
- On weather: "Only fools and children claim to be able to predict the weather."
- On late springs: "Don't worry, anything we don't finish this year, we can do next year."
- On seeding: "It's a mathematical fact; you can fit more seed in a crooked row."
- On soil nutrient management: "There is no better fertilizer than the footprints of the farmer."
- On plows: "It takes about ten acres to shine up a set of plows. Once you get them shined up and running true, take them off and keep them at the foot of your bed."
- Nileisms on plowing: "If you can't plow straight, plow at the end of the day and disk first thing in the morning; that will limit your exposure to the neighbors."
- On farming in general: "It's a great life if you don't weaken." (When I asked him 'what happens if you do weaken?' he looked at me sternly and said "how should I know?")

And finally, one hot day in July after fighting irrigation all day long and still coming up short, when we could not not finish but still we didn't, I was sitting on a bucket in the shop with my head in my hands. Nile was standing next to me getting ready to leave. He was gazing up at the rafters and then he asked, "Hey, do you have a piece of stout rope about 6 feet long? Thinking he had somehow come up with a plan to fix our irrigation problems, I gave an enthusiastic "yes!" he just looked at me and said, "I better take it with me."

So... lean into it. There is nothing we can do to change the weather, but a Piña Colada in the rain tastes just as sweet. As Nile would say, with a broad smile, "endeavor to persevere!"

Mike Peroni is here to answer all of your farm machinery and tool questions! A longtime Washington state farmer, he has learned a thing or two about repair and maintenance. He's rooting for you to do repairs and machinery work yourself; however, he is not responsible for outcomes. Please take caution, be safe out there and do additional research as needed.

Send your questions to mechanicmike@tilthalliance.org