

Weather-perfect harvest contrast to last year's rain, snow

Written by Elizabeth Barrett

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Producers cruise through corn, soybean fields.

Trying to harvest high-moisture corn and soybeans after three snowstorms last October is likely an unpleasant memory in the minds of Gothenburg and area farmers.

Not a lasting one, however, as combines and grain carts roll through fields this October under sunny, blue skies while corn dries naturally in temperatures that have reached into the upper 80s.

Last Friday, local farmer Duane Sukraw maneuvered his Case International Harvester combine through rows of cornstalks north of Gothenburg.

“So far this is one of the best harvests I can remember,” Sukraw said about weather conditions. “Last year, there really wasn’t much corn picked until November.”

Soggy fields and wet corn topped off a 2009 growing season with ample rainfall and cooler-than-usual temperatures that delayed spring planting and the maturing of corn.

“Fortunately the corn stood well last year in the snow,” Sukraw noted. “It could have been worse

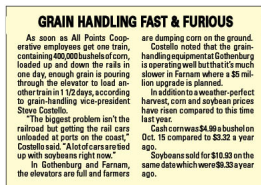
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had there been wind but there wasn't."

The weather cooperated better in November when many farmers completed harvest.



Once corn and soybeans were out of the fields, yields were the second highest in Nebraska history.

Despite perfect harvest weather this year, United States Department of Agriculture Statistics Service officials say the state's corn crop is predicted to be 4% under last year's yields.

However soybeans are expected to be 8% higher than in 2009, according to the USDA.

If temperatures hold and equipment breakdowns are minimal, Sukraw said he hopes to be finished harvesting corn by the end of the month.

Sukraw, along with son Ryan, raise about 1,500 acres of yellow corn for snack food and popcorn and 300 acres of soybeans which have already been picked.

Besides digging through snowdrifts and waiting for fields to dry during harvest last year, farmers spent time and money drying corn.

Sukraw had to use supplemental heat to remove humidity from the air on corn in bins he usually dries with natural air.

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Given last year's precipitation challenges, Sukraw joked about the drought the area endured in the early years of 2000.

"We know how to raise crops in dry weather so when there's lots of rain, it makes people buggy," he said with a laugh. "People don't get the things done like they planned."

Although Sukraw grew up on a farm, he didn't start farming full-time until 1995 after working for what is now All Points Cooperative.

He hasn't regretted his decision, noting that—except during planting and harvest—he seldom does any one job more than 10 days.

"If you work for a large corporation and do a good job, typically the corporation gets the benefit of your efforts," Sukraw said. "There's a lot of risk in farming but it's possible to benefit from your efforts."

If Indian summer continues as predicted and without equipment problems, Sukraw said he and Ryan can do some field work this fall.

ebarrett@gothenburgtimes.com 308-537-3636