

Harvest holdup—Farmers wait for corn, soybeans to ripen

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
Thursday, 01 October 2009 13:51 -



Weather a little weird this year.

Farmers in Dawson County and elsewhere know about uncertainty.

That's the name of the game.

Still, they can't help but wish away killer freezes when seed is planted in the spring and pray for the right amount of rain—minus hail and high winds—through the long days of summer.

With days of Indian summer at a minimum so far this September, they wait for soybeans and corn to mature.

Because of ample rainfall and cooler-than-usual temperatures, farmers planted later in the spring.

Throughout the summer and early fall, there have been fewer optimum growing days for both corn and soybeans.

In fact, combines have just started to roll through soybean rows in Dawson County and corn harvest is expected to begin in late October.

All Points Cooperative vice president of grain Steve Costello said soybean harvest is about 1 1/2 weeks later than usual.

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Still, Costello and Dawson County Extension agent Bruce Treffer expect a good crop of both soybeans and corn at this point.

U.S. Department of Agricultural officials predict the largest soybean crop and highest corn yields in the history of farming nationwide.

Based on Sept. 1 conditions, Nebraska's corn crop is forecast at a record high 1.55 billion bushels which is 11% above last year, according to USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service, Nebraska Field Office.

If that happens, the 2009 harvest would surpass the 1.47 billion grown in 2007.

State soybean production is forecast at 237 million bushels which is 5% higher than the 2008 crop.

"Yields look good even though everything's late," Costello said.

Compared to other corn-growing states, Costello said Nebraska is in good shape.

"We're farther ahead than Minnesota, the Dakotas and Iowa which generally get a frost before we do," he said.

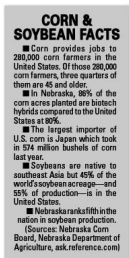
Temperatures hovering around the 33-degree mark in Gothenburg Monday night produced a light frost which probably won't affect test weights, according to Mark Ballmer, vice president of agronomy at All Points Cooperative.

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That's because of the maturity of both soybeans and corn at this point.



Hail in the county last summer damaged some crops but around Gothenburg, ag officials said it was fairly minimal.

When corn harvest starts, Treffer said some farmers have talked about drying corn themselves or paying an elevator to do it.

“Energy costs are more reasonable this year,” Treffer said.

Costello said they expect to fire up the dryer at All Points like they did last year.

“I’ve never seen two drying seasons like we’ve had back to back,” he said about the 2008 and 2009 crops. “It looks like we’ll be drying a lot of corn if we don’t get some 80-degree days.”

All Points was drying corn during the early morning hours of Nov. 20, 2008, when grain dust exploded and blew out the top of the main elevator.

Crews are still working to restore drying, storing and train-loading capacity at the elevator.

“It’s good timing with a late harvest but it’s still not enough,” Costello said.

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The grain buyer said the elevator is capable of drying wet corn but it will be limited.

All Points should also be ready to load both soybeans and corn on rail cars.

“But with one leg (on the repaired elevator), we won’t load fast,” Costello noted.

When it comes to selling corn or soybeans, Treffer said farmers who expect to see sizeable profits this year may be disappointed.

“There are no current ag commodity prices that will make anyone rich,” Treffer said.

In fact, Costello said October cash corn is \$1.40 lower this year per bushel than last and soybeans are 88 cents less than in 2008.

Input costs are not helping either, both Costello and Treffer said.

Cash rent, seed, fertilizer—everything farmers buy to raise crops—has increased.

“So \$3 corn is not going to work this year and prices will probably get worse,” Costello said.

In the meantime, farmers watch and wait.

What it boils down to now—as always—is weather.

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“Last year, harvest lasted forever,” Treffer said, referring to rain that kept farmers out of their fields. “It may be perfect weather this year.”

Brock and his dad Britt Anderson had pretty good weather Monday when they started harvesting 600 acres of dryland, short-season corn.

Brock said they plant the 91-day corn so they can harvest it and still sow a wheat crop.

He estimated that picking short-season corn—sold to All Points for cattle feed—was about a week behind because they couldn't get into wet fields with their equipment.

“We hope to get our beans out in a week when they're dried down,” Brock said, noting that harvest of irrigated corn will hopefully begin in two to three weeks.

ebarrett@gothenburgtimes.com 308-537-3636