

Cool, wet weather slows grain drying; relief not in sight

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A record cool summer has yielded to a record cool fall. That combined with wet weather has slowed natural corn and soybean drying in the field, forcing farmers to dry their crops in the bin.

Nebraska farmers are facing harvest in wetter than normal conditions this year, said Tom Dorn, UNL Extension educator in Lancaster County.

“Soybeans usually dry very well in the field, but we haven’t had the kind of fall where they have been able to, so farmers are trying to do the drying in the bin,” he said.

When weather conditions are warm, breezy and sunny, corn can dry down 25% per day in the field. Drying corn in the bin can take about the same time as drying it in the field if the corn in the bin is being dried with unheated, natural air at 1 cubic foot of air per minute per bushel.

“However, once it is in the bin, the crop is safe, and a wet snow won’t knock it down,” Dorn said.

For long-term storage without aeration, corn should be at 15% moisture and soybeans at 13%.

Before the rain this week, corn planted before rains in early May was averaging around 17% moisture and group 2 soybeans were about 13-15% moisture, Dorn said.

“However, longer season varieties or fields planted late are running considerably wetter,” he said. “Producers from the eastern third of the state have said they have corn fields as high as 30% moisture and soybean fields were testing around 18% moisture, and that was before the rain. Soybeans are likely to be wetter today than they were a week ago.”

Al Dutcher, UNL state climatologist, said forecasts do not indicate any changes in the current weather pattern anytime soon.

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A storm system is predicted to hit the state Tuesday which should pull in enough cold air that the western two-thirds of the state could see snow.

In addition, a second, more potent system is expected to hit the state around Nov. 1-2. This system also will have the potential for snow.

“Essentially every storm system with our current temperature pattern and jet stream has the potential for accumulating snow,” Dutcher said. Also, “at this point of the year, we could deal with very wet snow.

“However, my guess is sooner or later we’ll get some drying weather, but currently the medium range models (14 days) continue to point toward storm systems impacting the Central Great Plains every four to five days.”

Dorn said the time required to dry wet grain depends on the grain’s initial moisture content, the grain dryer’s airflow rate, the humidity and temperature of air coming into the bin, and how much the temperature inside is increasing if a heated drying system is used.

This, combined with higher energy costs, can quickly add expenses to a crop that already has higher than usual input costs, he said.

Corn can be dried faster by using a propane burner. For example, if 20 degrees could be added to the ambient air temperatures, it can reduce drying time in half.

However, this also adds the cost of propane.

“Add that to the electric bill, and it will cost more but save you some time,” he said.

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Dorn said soybeans should not be dried with heated air because they will over dry, especially at the bottom of the bin. Dorn does not recommend running a stirring system when drying soybeans because of the damage it could cause.

If rain continues, wet soil could stop farmers from getting into the fields to harvest altogether.

“We’re actually in a lot better shape than the Dakotas,” he said. “They may have to wait until the ground freezes to get in (their fields),” he said.

While the state hasn’t had a lot of significant precipitation, a quarter-inch of rain is a big deal when there are not good drying days, he said.

And with these temperatures, Nebraskans should expect to see harvest last until Thanksgiving or even early December.

For more detailed information about grain drying, visit [Crop Watch](#) , UNL Extension’s crop production newsletter.