

CROP UPDATE

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The checkered flag was dropped over most of the weekend for the 2010 planting season. The pace at which the five to ten feet deep snow banks melted and the water disappeared surprised those of us who expected to be waist deep in snow until mid-April. Apparently miracles do happen with weather. Is the good weather for real, or is something bad going to happen shortly. That sort of sounds like something coming from a Cubs fan, doesn't it?

Historically the planting pace that was released on Monday had this year's progress tied with that of 2004. If one looks back through the 1990s and 2000 the even numbered years have tended to be cool and dry with early plantings while the odd numbered years have been wet with regular delays in getting the crops planted on time. In many of those even numbered cool springs the growing seasons continued dry until maybe June when rainfall becomes plentiful and produces high yields of drier than expected corn yields and pleasantly surprising soybean yields.

The only fly in the ointment is now this little volcano named Eyjafjallajokull. (How long would it take all of us to learn to spell or pronounce that name?) By early this week many amateur volcanologists and trained meteorologists had looked at historical records and found out that the subject had last blown its top early in the 1600s and 1800s. Those events lasted 13 to 15 months. When those eruptions ceased the bad news was that the neighboring large volcano responded by blowing its top. A few people have already noted that the earth has been very geologically active with all of the big earth quakes and now the volcanoes and are wondering what else might be in store for us during the coming summer. Will there be something in the weather or amount of sunlight received that affects the growing season? Last season the problem was lack of sunspot activity that reduced GDUs by over 20%. Already by mid-April the period of low sunspot activity has shown some sign of subsiding. What is in store for this year? Isn't raising crops fun?

The Planting Pace

The state and national surveys as well as any tour of the state or region in the Midwest tell that planting progress for April 20th is as high as we have ever seen it. I think the Tuesday released state surveys told that 19% of the corn crop was planted by the weekend, which ties for the 2004 pace. Given the fact that Sunday through Wednesday has been clear sailing for further field work it was what we expected. In my travels in the last ten days I have covered an area from Ames to Columbia and KC MO and then Sioux Falls to Humboldt, Waterloo and Iowa City. The soils have been dry and workable, planter size has been increased with a high percentage of the operators and everyone remembers last year's numerous planting delays. Everyone was determined to not be caught with fields not planted when the wet weather begins.

Operators have been asking if this early planting is a good thing. Over the past 15 or 20 years we seem to have a 10 to 14 days period in mid April where conditions are dry and many of the fields are dry enough to work and plant. The farmers who take advantage of that warm spell to plant and get the seed swelled before the cold rains return end up with very good stands, good yields, and drier grain at harvest. Even when there are few GDUs received the plants seem to

develop and move towards maturity. Those that wait to plant late in that cycle and plant the day or two prior to the cold rains' arrival have cold water imbibed by the seed kernels and have poorer stands and sometimes end up replanting a portion of their acres. There might not be anything scientific about it, but that is what has happened. So given a choice of getting acres planted while the ground is warm should be a good thing and should help to produce drier grain at harvest.

As far as starting to plant soybeans, the proper response gets harder to judge. Small beans can sometimes take freezing weather better than small corn plants can. It would be nice to hold off until April 25th or 28th, but if rain is in the forecast and you would be sitting idle otherwise, it is hard to not put bean seed in the planter and get started. As a word of caution, if you are in that group make sure to apply your planned fungicide seed treatment product to protect the seed or seedling against *Phytophthora* or *Pythium*.

When I have stopped at seed companies or seed sheds it is surprising how many operators are still not having an inoculants applied while the seed is run through the treater. Work by Jim Buerlein at Ohio State and Tim Maloney at his research farm near Janesville show that yield increases from applying the *Bradyrhizobium* will typically run from 2.5 to 4 bu/A. That is money well spent.

Soil Densities

One thing I had planned to do was run my computerized compaction tester in a number of fields to see if the soils were hard or soft. Considering that the ground was very wet at harvest and the thick snow cover formed early many of us expected the soils to be like pavement. So far what I have found is that those tested fields have shown soil densities in the 140 to 190 psi range, which indicates nice soft soils and that rooting should take place with few problems. Where water sat last year the readings fall into the 23- to 260 range which is still below the 300 psi range, which is where roots begin to have problems penetrating the deeper profile.

Pre Emerge Herbicides

More acres of corn and beans were treated with residual herbicides this spring than in perhaps the last ten years. It's too early to judge the ending effect and benefit, but by late July and August we will be able to see if it was a good thing. With more tougher to kill broadleaves now present and wet spells that can keep us out of the fields, having such products applied can buy us time and even provide season long control if they were selected for that purpose.

Many corn growers will be applying products that contain softeners that protect the plants against products that in past years could cause browning or yellowing of the leaf tissue. The herbicides that caused problems were those in the SU, PPO, or HPPS families. Beginning just a year or two ago companies began to mix in softeners that would excite or boost the activity of the physiological pesticide degradation pathways termed either as P-450 cytochrome or glutathione s-transferase. What the plants were then able, with the help of the softeners, was to metabolize the herbicides and suffer no harm. Back in the late 1980 those that were available but did not offer 100% effectiveness were those in the 1.8 Naphtalic family. It also was a p-450 booster. In the future we are likely to see member of the FOP and DIM family used post on emerged corn with good results.

Thus growers will be using products such as Resolve, Balance Flex, and Corvus that make use of softeners. Hybrids that have low P-450 activity levels such as those in the A632 and B37 families should avoid yellowing and stunting, even in cool and cloudy weather.

Soybean Management

In the coming one or two weeks it will be the time to decide what products you will be applying or having applied to your soybean seed. The choices are many but fall into several categories. The givens should be a Metalxyl (Apron) containing product to protect against wet soil diseases and an inoculant to help the plant form N fixing nodules. If you are planting early and are within 2 to 4 miles of a grove of trees or CRP prairie, where bean leaf beetles overwintered, consider applying one of the systemic neo-nic products. Planting into no-till or where green vegetation has been worked under can increase seedling insect problems such as seed corn maggots. There are also new biological that have great merit such as the new engineered Trichodermas or new Pseudomonas bacteria that act as biological shield or nutrient releasers. We are using one called Saber X which came from a reknown researcher at Cornell University. It can also be used on corn.

Good luck in getting the crops in the ground.

Other topics:

Nitrogen Programs

Insect Control Plans

Soil Testing and Lack of Enough Data

Insect Activity and Their Radar

Corn Nematodes