

CROP UPDATE

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What a difference a year makes. In 2009 many farmers in Iowa were still trying to plant corn in late May and complete their bean planting before July 1st. This year nearly everyone was on a record pace to complete as much of their corn planting before the big rains began. They held off enough that a lot of farmers in central and southern Iowa got done with corn one to two weeks ago and many used their nervous energy to plant beans at perhaps the earliest date they had ever done that task. Given the fact that most research shows that the higher yields and greater number of nodes are formed on early planted beans, if they took the precaution of treating the seed with systemic fungicides they should be happy with the results. As far as knowing what was the right thing to do, we will all get the answer in a few weeks when we see how stands fared and after the yields make that determination this fall. In farming being timid usually does not accomplish much.

Just as spring showers bring April mud and May flowers, it also brings the return of the baseball season and this year new news about Iowa college basketball. It looks like we may see another Mississippi River series as the Cards and Twins are both doing well both offensively, defensively and with their pitching. Wouldn't another 1987 type series be fun to watch? Then somewhat unexpectedly both Hawk and Cyclone fans got to baptize new basketball coaches. In other words, the Mayor returned to his roots.

Corn Plantings

Everyone was pedal to the metal for the last three weeks in an effort to get as much of their corn crop planted as possible. The sun shone and the temps were warm for that time period and the first planted fields have corn that could be rowed for the last ten days. As long as night time temps can remain at 35 F or above across the state all of those fields should be fine. Having good stands with corn emerged by early May and a full profile will have to be viewed as favorable to yields and likely the opposite for prices. Those operators who have had to deal with more rain or wet soils should still be early enough to still get their acres planted within that April 25th to May 10 optimum window.

Over the years when many growers used to summarize their yields at the end of the season like to find out when their highest yielding field has been planted. Many surprisingly found that there seemed to be something special about May 9th. Was it an anomaly or was it the date when soil temps were most favorable for fast root growth and establishment of a healthy plant? Given a choice the earlier planted corn plants now have a chance to flower earlier, stay shorter in stature, use less moisture during their entire life cycle, and produce drier grain this fall.

When the rains fell last week or might this week most operators were or will be ready for a break. How many noticed that the big storm of two weeks ago was similar to those big storms of 2009 which spun counterclockwise and moved in from the east or northeast? Will the warmth stay with us or cool off as several models predict?

Soil Densities

I will continue to carry my soil penetrometer with me to see how the soils are in different fields. Most of those last week were softer than expected. There are still a percentage of fields where there is a 6 to 12 inch deep layer with density readings in the 240 to 290 psi range. It appears that the lack of enough freeze thaw cycles to break up all compaction in the top foot is to blame. A number of planter operators have mentioned that they had to run with more down pressure than ever before and the boxes bounced more than normal due to hard soils. In a month we may enough observations made to be able to correlate amount of residue or depth of snow cover was the common trait that influenced which fields are now soft or hard.

Nitrogen Programs

What happened in many second year and continuous corn fields last year was an expensive lesson for many growers. The high degree of stalk intactness coupled with wet spring and early summer weather left many corn fields deficient in plant available nitrogen. Many operators took time to plan programs that will incorporate steps to either use N-stabilizers, side dress a portion of their N, or used N forms that are more likely to remain available later into the season. In many cases the risk from residue tie-up is about as great since many fields did not receive any tillage last fall. If you are in that crowd, be sure to plan on how you will minimize this positional based tie-up.

Soil Testing

Several of my colleagues and myself get to look at soil tests each fall and spring that either we had taken or a third party was involved, and then try to form fertilizer and soil remediation plans from them. Too often they don't provide enough information to have a consultant do the optimum job of making recommendations. This inadequacy involves both fields where too many acres were involved with each sample as well as those where sampling was done in 2.5 acre grids. I like to use a lab that will automatically run a Mehlich P test when every the pHs reach 7.4 or higher. Then obtaining the base saturation levels can be a big help in knowing where to start if soils are hard or tend to crust in the spring. Another area that needs addressing by all operators is that of testing for micro-nutrients. The best way to explain this and drive home the importance of such testing is by listing the things that can go wrong with the crops when each micro is short. The place to start might be to get a good fertility reference guide and see what the visual symptoms look like. Remember that there are mineral shortages that can be confusing and tough to diagnose, but can be costly if ignored. Anyone who had corn that was slow to develop last year with high moisture levels, or were prone to leaf diseases may find an underlying shortage of Mn and Sulfur. I have read a few recent articles stating that Manganese is never short in Iowa soils. However I received soil test results back this week from fields in north central Iowa, Clarion Nicollet soils where a number of the samples tested 1 to 2 PPM. These were fields managed with conventional weed control products. It appears to be due to relying solely on an N-P-K fertilizer program being used for the last few decades. If the Mn test had not been done the grower and I would still be flying blind with serious consequences on the near horizon.

Soybean Planting

Everyone who is completely satisfied with their last bean yields should continue using the management programs they have used in those years. A few growers are in that category or would have been if those two to three weeks in August would have contained 50% more

sunshine. If you have not been satisfied, and still have bean acres to plant, now is the time to be proactive and make an effort to do what it takes to raise higher yields. The male and female farmers who are currently raising pleasing bean yields have found that most varieties have the genetic potential to double the yields if the weather is favorable to grain fill in August. The trick is to be able to set up a fertility program that delivers or makes available the nutrients needed in a timely fashion, then produce a healthy seedling that is forced to form the optimum number of branches and nodes, and do what it takes to produce as many flowers and as high of pod retention as possible. There is no rule that says you can be imaginative or think outside the box. Guys like Kip are fun to get to know, because they explore every nook and cranny is a plant's metabolism and growth pattern. Most recognize that soil and leaf biology is very important in the grain scheme of cropping. We need more groups of similar minded farmers who have a similar goal and can learn together. They might as well get started this year.

For the next few months let the sun shine and full speed ahead.

Insect Control Plans

Soil Testing and Lack of Enough Data

Insect Activity and Their Radar

Corn Nematodes