

CROP UPDATE

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Things are shaping up quite nicely in what has turned out to be a much nicer April thru June period that anyone expected. Except for the three cold, wet, weeks that arrived in late April and mid-May the weather has been more conducive to good crop production that what we had to work with in both 2008 and 2009. In those years working around waterholes or trying to figure out how late we could plant corn and beans, then trying to finish up by July 4th was a main concern to those of us in the northern 80% of the state. Farmers in extreme southern Iowa are still plagued by constant deluges on a twice-weekly basis as they struggle to get everything planted.

On the national scene the Gulf oil spill is still the big news item. Any one over the age of 35 remembers when the Exxon Valdez event occurred and the problems they had in Alaska for years as the sticky oil caused all sorts of economic and environmental problems. You have to feel for the people of the Gulf region that depend on ocean based activities for their income. In the grand scheme of economics there are about six basic industries; agriculture, ranching, mining, fishing, forestry, and oil/natural gas. In each of those people use their hard work and capital to harvest a natural resource that the good earth provides. When we get floods or severe storms it can affect people and businesses that never thought they were connected to us. With ranching everyone from the cow calf man in southern Iowa or western Montana put in five or more years to build their herds to produce first a heifer that eventually results in a finished steer in the feedlot. If disease or poor prices are destructive, it affects everyone that eats meat. Now through no fault of their own the Gulf residents' livelihoods are taken away for the summer or for the next few years. If we want to identify the culprits do we point fingers at environmentalists who forced oil companies to drill miles deep in the ocean rather than in North Dakota at the Bakken formation, or their unwillingness to reconsider utilizing nuclear? Or is it BP who may have cut corners when installing fail-safe valves? Or as Dave Kruse has rightly pointed out, spineless congressmen who have not realized the value of biofuels and haven't had the fortitude to support them? If any of the last presidents could have gotten anything right it should have been an energy security policy based on sound and sustainable practices. Brazil leaders have been way in front of the U.S. in energy security and getting things done in sound fashion.

How many of you were sent the You-Tube clips of the good old boys who played and proved the idea that flailing grass hay along the beaches may have been able to soak up much of the oil and allowed hay or seaweed retrievers to pick up the oil soaked organic matter? It looked like an idea that could have worked and would have been inexpensive to put into practice. It wasn't high tech enough, but looked promising. At least someone in power should have paid attention.

The Crops

At this point the nation's corn crop is receiving very high marks for the percent listed as good or excellent. In most cases it does look good, but there are quite a few fields and quite a percentage that show noticeable to major problems. From Missouri through southern Illinois and

clear to Ohio it has been raining for about the last month. Thus many acres were either in need of replanting a portion of the crop or they are still trying to get planted for the first time. In eastern Iowa a very wet June has created wet enough conditions that seedling rots are continuing to kill corn plants and thin out stands. Across Central and Western Iowa many corn on corn fields are showing classic signs of allelopathy or other maladies that results in poor plant growth and uneven stands in fields. As you drive around the state there is a great disparity again as to how the fields could be rated. There are a smaller number of 'perfect fields'. There are more that look very good, but with a few areas that hold problems related to machinery, soil types, drainage, poor weed control, or soil conditions. The bright spot is that the majority don't have water holes that occupy 20 to 25 % of the acreage as they did the two previous years.

In the past three weeks the corn crop has had one of the most rapid growth spurts that most people can ever remember. In a number of fields the plants were knee high by June 4th and are now close to filling the 30 inch rows. If temps move back into the low to mid 80s we can do a bit of calculating and project that the first tassels may start poking out of the whorl during the July 5th thru 12th time frame.

In a number of the fields that were affected by frost the stands shows uneven growth. There appear to be plants that survived but are not as vigorous as they should be. The roots are often infected with a rotting organism. The second main problem appears to be having a percentage of plants that seem to be possessing low vigor and seem unable to form much vegetative growth.

The soybean growth has also picked up in pace and there are now beans where the plants range from the V5 down to the V1 stage. The former are on track to yield very well if everything else is done or happens right. The smaller ones may be at a disadvantage as later planted beans typically don't form as many podded nodes, thus pod numbers are reduced unless extra branching occurs.

Black Cutworms

It has been possible to find black cutworm affected plants this past week along I-80 in the state. I have seen the most in fields east of Hwy 14. The percentage of plants cut has been under the treatment threshold, so no infestations I have seen required treatment. When scouting, look for plants that have the center portion wilting down during the day. When you dig those plants they have a hollowed out main stem at or slightly below the soil line. Note the size of the larvae that are hiding out near the base of the plant. Those that are still only .25 to .5 inches long will still be feeding for another 1 to 2 weeks and could affect another 6 to 8 plants. Those close to 1 inch long should be close to pupating and done with feeding.

Managing the Surviving Broadleaves and Observations

Now that most of the corn fields have received their initial application of a non-select herbicide it will be time to see how good the kill rate was on all broadleaves. So far the waterhemp, smartweed, kochia, and giant ragweed still seem to be presenting the biggest challenge. Scout a week or so later to see if patches of weeds are still surviving and growing. Then combine these observations with the known competitiveness of each species of weeds versus your tolerance for cosmetic versus potential economic loss if you were to do nothing. If enough broadleaves survive to warrant retreatment then do so using a product which is still within label and should be effective. Be sure to try to figure out the cause for non-control so any nozzle problems, gallonage, or surfactant problems could be eliminated.

A few other things are now observable in the fields. The first is that starting late last week there were a number of corn fields that seemed to be flashing a bronze color. That is unusual. Beginning at about the same time a yellowing of many soybean fields seemed to be occurring. What the cause or meaning of those is still a topic of or for debate. Keep an eye out in your neighborhood and on your acres for the same things.

Those intending to apply a micro-nutrient pack to their corn crop this season should start making plans to acquire and apply the product. The perfect timing is still open to some debate, but getting it done during a period of nutrient uptake by the plants anytime after the V6 stage will likely be correct.