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It's late August with the Farm Progress Show arriving soon. We are now wondering where the summer growing season went. For starting so early and farmer friendly, the rest of the season sure seemed to have gone wrong. The condition of the two major crops varies widely across the state. Those in the northwest, by virtue of religious affiliation and soil type have another record setting crop in the field. Those in the southwest section have a decent crop, but will more challenges due to several big rains that have caused growth and fertility problems. Those in the northeast have good crops that have generally stayed green, but are not looking as good north of Hwy 20 as they have in past years. That leaves the central, southeast and eastern parts of the state. Theirs is a different story that can be seen a bit from the road and high viewing points. If one flies over the area and gets to see the crop from a height of 500 to 1000 feet the full impact of the wacky weather and an unseen force that has created the ugliest and more diseased crop ever become evident.

I have visited with quite a few people who get into airplanes regularly and get a chance to see the crop from a perspective that doesn't hide the blemishes. Last season I flew four times during the grain fill period and the ponding and diseased nature of the corn and bean crops was glaringly clear. I will have flown several times this week and the crop in central and north central looks more like one that should be declared a disaster rather than a record setter. Colleagues who have been in a plane or copter in eastern Iowa say the same thing. Thus while the USDA and other producer groups are for some reason touting a huge crop, there seems to be a glaring disconnect with what is really happening in the field. In this rushed column I will try to deal with a few of the items affecting the crop and what needs to be monitored prior to harvest.

The Farm Progress Show is scheduled to begin next week at its location east of Boone. The new site with solid roads should make handling the show even if rain falls much easier. It is the big show for farmers and Ag business people from Iowa, Illinois, and Indiana. Hopefully everything flows well for the sponsors. The mood of the attendees is always much better if grain prices are headed upwards or at profitable levels. One thought that a high percentage of the growers who now or used to attend the show is that most companies are addressing the needs only of the 5,000+ acre operators. In a year when SDS is so bad, and compaction with loss of soil oxygen is a factor, a question that attendees may want to ask machinery consultants is the weight and PSI load of each item they are displaying. Remember than bigger and heavier might be part of the problem.

Observations from 800 Feet Up

From up in the air Webster, Hamilton, Green and Story Counties look like Minnesota in that there are at least 10,000 lakes ranging from 5 to 60 acres in size. The corn crop is extremely yellow, much more so than in 1993, when we had much more rain than this year. That yellowing covers up some of the disease infestation. If you tie together air and field observations it become easy to diagnose record levels of six or eight major root, stalk, and leaf diseases that are affecting or will be affecting grain fill and plant health through the fall. Spots of Goss's wilt killed plants are easy to spot. Leaf diseases and Fusarium root rots have affected most of the corn. Over half of the acres are being affected by SDS

Corn Crop Maturity

The excess in GDUs has continued and most of the crop is now about six weeks ahead of last year in development. That means that a substantial percentage of the corn should be forming a black layer in the next week. At this black layering point the moisture content of the grain should be in the 33 to 34% range. With BL occurring this early and if the husks open the grain could dry down at a rate near .75 point per day. Projecting a black layering date of August 27, the grain could dry down to 30% by September 1st and possibly 20% by September 15th. If the weather stays warmer than normal with strong breezes it could actually be faster than that. Any real strong breeze is not something that will be welcome after September 10th or after the next wet period.

Last year a high percentage of the crop shut down due to several factors two to three weeks before black layer and four to six weeks before normal. Every plant development guide and the corn bible tells that the plant is supposed to remain alive and healthy until a few days after the black layer forms. Then the husk layer is supposed to open up and drydown is supposed to begin. This year the visible decline began on July 7th when the yellowing began. That was after it was noted for the second year that several pathogen caused root rots had actually been creating problems with seedling rots.

I attended the FC Winfield's Solutions field day near Farnhamville on Tuesday. Driving there and driving back it was easy to see corn plants that were already dead. The ears were already spongy and the kernels were shrinking up. The hopes of getting heavy test weight grain from those fields might only be a pipe dream. Hopefully it will be heavier and better quality than last year, but that may not happen. The weird, GDU short weather was not the only controlling factor last year.

The two agronomists who cover all of Iowa told of the six to eight major corn disease and six different diseases that they have been chasing all summer. They had never seen such serious problems over as many acres as they have been seeing this year. The one new disease than they informed the growers about was Goss's wilt. Their prediction and advice was that this bacterial disease could be a game changer as to how we will grow corn and manage residue in future years. Goss's wilt until 2008 had been a corn disease in Nebraska and Colorado. There were a few areas around Jefferson, Carroll and Fort Dodge that had the disease show up and affect corn plants in 2009. This year, either spread from those areas or else by the big rain fronts, the disease can be found from Colorado to Ohio. A good scout who knows what to look for can likely find the quarter sized, coffee colored, oozing lesions on every plant in every field in those states. The bacteria have the potential to and are already rotting stalks and cobs in eastern Iowa. Heavily infected fields and rotted second ears have a smell that is somewhere between rotten silage and a dead catfish. All management guides recommend that all residue must be buried or destroyed in those fields to kill out the inoculum. How that meshes with soil saving conservation practices has to be rectified. The silence about Goss's wilt by major groups is deafening. It could be a curse for us in future years.

There are still a few green, still-filling fields that can be seen. We must analyze what those farmers have done differently that has insulated those plants from the diseases ravaging other fields to start forming management plans for other growers' fields. Is it the gypsum or sulfur that those guys have been applying to the soil to loosen the soil? Is it the micro-nutrient packs that were applied to the V6 to VT corn plants? Was it the biological pack that was applied to the seed or in-furrow to reestablish the rhizosphere bacteria and fungi? I have had the chance to visit several fields that received the V6 to VT micro-nutrient packs. They look good, with those that received it earlier looking the best. They all show none to very few disease symptoms. In most cases it has been a life or death matter to the plants. Farmers will have to include one like Defender into their program. Remember that this is not a normal, naturally caused problem.

Soybean Diseases

If we had been told this spring that aphids were not going to be a management problem, we would likely have been overjoyed thinking that happy days with raising soybean were here again. Instead this

Fusarium caused SDS root rot is causing major problems in the state. In areas south of Ft Dodge all the way through south east Iowa many of the fields have half to all of their acres affected. Several factors are in play as being partial causes: 2.5 years worth of compaction; saturated soils for the season; earlier than normal planting; very susceptible germplasm ; and a very high Fusarium fungal population in the soil. In some cases many companies will be discarding a high percentage of their varieties because the growers will not want to purchase any more susceptible varieties. Only taking the step of selecting different varieties will not solve the problem if those other factors remain in place.

There are going to be lots of good questions being asked after this season and deservedly so. Who is going to have the answers and the evidence, and is what they have credible? At least it looks like the farming populace has awakened. Maybe they won't be the frog in the pot.