



PERSPECTIVES

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How much did hot weather hurt this year's corn crop?

Throughout the summer, reports have come in from our agronomists regarding the effect that prolonged drought conditions, combined with hot temperatures, have had on this year's corn crop. Poor, uneven stands and blank kernels are among the top of the list.

Stephen Schumacher, agronomist in southwest Kansas, said the heat had a tremendous effect on the corn crop. "We had a shorter pollination window where the timing of the silking versus pollen shed resulted in partial ears, and some corn not pollinating at all," he explains.

As of late August, stalk rot was another growing concern. "A lot of farmers have already taken ensilage off or are going for high moisture corn where stalk rot is a problem. Stalk rot is increasing in severity as we dry down," Schumacher says.

In northeast Kansas, the weather has painted a similar picture. Jason Reichart, agronomist near Silver Lake, said prolonged drought and continuous days of high heat were catalysts for many abnormal growing factors.

"The average corn yield will be one-third to one-half of what an average crop would be. It fired up early and died quick,"



UNEVEN GROWTH—Many corn fields exhibited lack of growth uniformity. Poor pollination and standability were also issues producers and agronomists had to contend with, such as with this field near Garden City, Kansas.

Reichart says. "We're finding some ear rot and had a fair amount of second generation corn borer. There was also an above average number of grasshoppers this year."

"There is a lot of variability in maturity within fields. In some areas, seed variety didn't make much of a difference because the heat was too much for even the drought-tolerant varieties. Plus, the wind really increased evapotranspiration rates," Reichart adds.

Many producers in Texas have experienced a slightly more forgiving summer. Jason Henry, agronomist near Dumas, said overall yields will be slightly above average this year, around 200 to 205 bushels.

"In some areas, we've had a lot of rain. But even where there hasn't been much rain, heat hasn't been a big problem. We haven't had a day over 100 degrees."

"It seems like anything under five gallons per acre per minute suffered somewhat. But, overall, we're in pretty good shape as far as water is concerned. Most people have cut back on their irrigated corn acres to have more irrigation water per acre, which has helped yields," Henry says.

Except for the typical spider mite infestation, insect and disease pressure have been about average in the Texas Panhandle. High moisture corn started coming off the end of August, and dry corn harvest will start around the second week of September.

In Oklahoma, Crop Quest agronomist Tom Stebly says harvested silage ranged from 21 to 27 tons per acre, and quality was good. But it's been a challenging year for dry grain.

"Producers have dealt with an increase in stalk rot and grey leaf spot pressure. In fields where disease advanced after Tilt application, we have seen premature plant death. This year, weather conditions have been such that it came on late, but when it did come we had to treat," Stebly says. Many fields have also had to be treated for spider mites.

Rainfall has been hit and miss for many areas of Oklahoma, but overall, moisture conditions are getting better. "We had such poor conditions through May, but with the rain we have received, we should have good conditions for drilling wheat," Stebly adds.

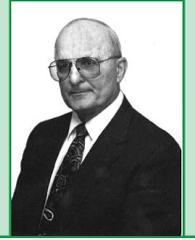
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Crop Quest is an employee-owned company dedicated to providing the highest quality agricultural services for each customer. The quest of our network of professionals is to practice integrity and innovation to ensure our services are economically and environmentally sound.

From My **PERSPECTIVE**

By Rollie Stukenholtz, CEO

Member, American Society of Agricultural Consultants • Certified Professional Agronomist



Subsurface factors play a role in water supply

If we just had a better picture of what is below the surface of the land we live on, we would sure be able to do a better job of managing our water.

It simply isn't feasible to drill enough holes to map the subsurface like we can the soil surface. This past summer has been challenging because water tables have dropped, and because the water has disappeared into underground cracks on so many fields. In some cases, we may just be recycling the aquifer.

We know from experience that when rivers flow full of water, they have numerous fingers that can extend for miles. These underground fingers of porous material allow water to flow to aquifers used to pump water. Water witchers have used this mysterious talent for years to find these underground channels of water bearing material. While some scoff at the ability of some people using a wire or stick to find water, I have personally had it proven to me that this is the case.

Those of us that live in close proximity to the Arkansas River are well aware of the impact this river has on irrigation wells several miles away. I have heard the same is true of other rivers like the Platte in Colorado and Nebraska.

When these rivers are dry or have very little stream flow, it does affect irrigation wells several miles away. We currently have lawsuits being filed across the Midwest because downstream water supplies are dwindling due to the drought.

I was involved in a dispute between wildlife interests and irrigators in the area known as Cheyenne Bottoms a few years back. While some so-called experts attempted to blame irrigators for the Bottom's inadequate water, I had serious doubts that farmers pumping their wells had any affect on the water supply to Cheyenne Bottoms.

Looks may be deceiving

Our people walk a lot of corn fields prior to harvesters entering the fields. We continue to get widespread reports this year of fields that look good from the road, but in checking ears find a high percentage of barren plants and nubbin ears.

Indications are that any plants suffering stress from soil compaction or poor water penetration succumbed to the extreme heat during the critical pollination period.

I have contacts in many areas of the Midwest, and it appears this problem is very widespread. This could be one of those years when looks are more deceiving than usual.

We wonder now when water is short everywhere if farmers in many cases are being penalized for a water shortage that is more the fault of Mother Nature than their own use of water for crop production. If we just knew more about what was under the surface, we would sure have a better handle on how the underground water system really works.

Emotions run high when water runs short

I have been predicting for years that water was going to be one of the most contentious issues of our times. Having been involved in numerous study committees on water issues, I have become well aware of the different views people have on water. Water is such a critical commodity that, until we have experienced shortages, we really don't appreciate it.

Several years ago, I became familiar with areas where the water was contaminated by oil well development. People living in these areas were forced to haul in all their water for personal and livestock use. This made life very difficult in these areas.

When we are forced to conserve, as many areas are today, we immediately develop priorities. In agriculture, we are constantly seeking crops that we can produce profitably with less water. While clean vehicles and a green lawn are nice, they become a secondary issue when there is insufficient water.

The problem is that there are still too few people who understand that water is a depleting resource, and the time may not be too far off when people who play golf may have to play golf on dry greens rather than the lush courses so many have become accustomed too. When that time comes, we will find out what water war really means.

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New farm program lacks regard for poor harvest years

By Ron O'Hanlon, president

In a recent article from Doane's *Crop Decisions Weekly* website, Allen Dever, Doane economist, pointed out the negative effect of the new farm program for this year compared to last year.

Dever comments, "... the prospects for the worst harvest since 1995 may create a double whammy for America's corn, wheat, sorghum and soybean producers."

According to Dever, the new counter-cyclical payment program is designed to provide more government aid when prices are lower and less aid when prices are higher.

Due to the projected lower yields from the extreme drought conditions the nation has experienced last summer, commodity prices have increased enough to eliminate LDPs and counter-cyclical payments. This means the producer with low yields will suffer a significant decline in total revenue, despite higher market prices.

There is an example in the article that shows the differences for a 500 base acreage corn producer under the different scenarios. Under the 1996 Farm Program, the total revenue with a normal yield would be \$208,886. A 40 percent lower yield would amount to \$145,086.

With the 2002 Farm Program, this same producer would receive \$194,042 for a normal yield and only \$130,042 for the lower yield. This even includes an \$8,000 crop insurance payment.

The complete article can be found at: www.cropdecisions.com/cdweekly.php

Corn Revenue Examples - \$2.40 Market Price				
	1996 Farm Law		2002 Farm Law	
	Normal Yield	Low Yield	Normal Yield	Low Yield
Corn - planted acreage	500	500	500	500
base acreage	500	500	500	500
pay yield	118	118	118	118
actual yield	150	90	150	90
APH for crop insurance	140	140	140	140
market price	2.40	2.40	2.40	2.40
loan rate	1.89	1.89	1.98	1.98
direct payment rate	0.269	0.269	0.28	0.28
target price	NA	NA	2.60	2.60
crop insurance coverage	70%	70%	70%	70%
crop insurance price	2.05	2.05	2.00	2.00
Direct payment (AMTA or PFC)	\$13,490	\$13,490	\$14,042	\$14,042
Supplement aid	15,396	15,396	NA	NA
Counter-cyclical payment	NA	NA	-	-
LDPs	-	-	-	-
Total Government Payments	28,886	28,886	14,042	14,042
Crop Insurance Indemnity	-	8,200	-	8,000
Market Revenue	180,000	108,000	180,000	108,000
Total Revenue	\$208,886	\$145,086	\$192,042	\$130,042

Fig. 1. National average corn price above \$2.32 per bushel will eliminate the counter-cyclical payment for 2002 crops. The maximum counter-cyclical payment would have been slightly more than \$17,000 in this example.

Recommendations can vary widely by agronomist

How is it that recommendations concerning a particular situation can be so different coming from employees of the same agronomic service company? Why does Crop Quest not have a book of recommendations or treatments for farmers? Some people have a difficult time understanding why there is not complete uniformity within the company.

You may have heard it said in regards to health care—If you are not satisfied with your doctor's opinion, get another one. We all know of situations where doctors have varying opinions, and yet we do not know which one is right until a course of action is chosen. Even then, that doesn't always mean the other doctor was wrong. It only means they had a different treatment idea.

Making a recommendation is not as simple as looking up an answer in a book. For an agronomist, much thought and additional information from other sources goes into forming a recommendation.

Our agronomists take into account weed infestation and/or insect outbreaks, and they also scan literature and research for products with the greatest efficacy and economics. They

make a judgment call in regards to how long a pest problem will be around and how long the pesticide residual should be. They consider whether there are, or may be, additional pests that could move in, while still achieving a cost effective treatment.

Agronomists keep in mind the financial status of the farmer and their expectations in regards to pest control. Some farmers prefer almost complete control, while others want to save a few dollars in control costs and put up with some degree of pests. The consultant takes into account the profitability of the crop itself and the treatment cost.

When more than one agronomist is asked their opinion about a recommendation, some may have information others don't have. Some will make a judgment call based on experiences that may differ from others.

Crop Quest recommendations are not something that are static. They are ever-changing based on research, education, experience, economics, expectations, the environment and client objectives. Remember, similar objectives can also be achieved by following different plans of action.

Outstanding **IN THE FIELD**

By Ron O'Hanlon, President

Member, National Alliance of Independent Crop Consultants • CPCC-I Certified



Take advantage of soil nitrogen

Early soil tests indicate that we may see higher than normal residual soil nitrogen carryovers. Testing for soil nitrate-nitrogen is a very good management practice, as the residual nitrogen should be credited toward fertilizer usage for the next crop.

In many cases, taking advantage of levels even as low as 10 pounds per acre nitrogen will normally pay for the cost of soil testing. However, you must soil test to know what is still present in the soil.

It is not uncommon to find higher than normal soil nitrate-nitrogen carryover when you have lower yields, due to the various stresses that the crops have experienced this past year.

In situations where the crops were abandoned due to the drought and heat and produced no yield, these fields should still have significant nitrogen carryover if fertilizer was applied prior to planting. Unless the weeds got completely out of hand, much

of the applied fertilizer should still be present.

High temperatures like we have experienced this past summer may also contribute to higher than normal mineralization of organic matter to nitrate-nitrogen. With the lack of rainfall over much of the area, there should have been almost no leaching of the nitrate-nitrogen.

Some soil test results are already showing nitrate-nitrogen levels exceeding more than 100 pounds of nitrogen per acre. If you price nitrogen at 12 cents per unit of nitrogen, this would be a cost savings of more than \$12.00 per acre. This kind of savings alone could make the difference between showing a profit or a loss for the next growing season.

Soil testing is a routine part of Crop Quest's normal service program because we understand the value of knowing what is present in the soil. If you need soil testing done on fields not under the care of a Crop Quest agronomist, be sure to let him know.

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