

Drought killing corn crop

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week, they started turning brown and they're gone, too."

"This Berks shale soil has a tendency to dry out. We had years before when we were hurting, but got some rain to help pull us out."

The dry summer was a complete turn-around from the spring. With 50-bushel wheat and 80-bushel oat yields in the bins, the small grain season was better than average. The sun was even welcomed so that the combining could be done.

But then the sun never quit and the rain did. It just grew hotter and hotter and drier and drier.

In addition to the corn, Wise's soybeans and hay fields are hurting, too.

The first cutting of alfalfa over some 25 acres yielded 4,000 bales. The second cutting yielded 400 bales — one-tenth as much.

The Wise family even put in a few rows of sweet corn to eat. There won't be any ears for roasting this year.

Wise put half his farm in PIK this year so at least those acres have been spared the searing, killing sun.

While Cumberland County was the first to get the wheels rolling toward declaring it a disaster area, neighboring York County to the south followed suit the next day. And, there will likely be others.

From the County ASCS level, through Harrisburg, the crop loss records will go on to Washington for the disaster designation and qualification for low-interest FmHA loans.

While drought conditions are spotty, depending on whether farms were lucky enough to be hit by hop-scotching thunderstorms or not, the hardest hit section of the state is the south-central area from

Bedford east to Lehigh and Northampton counties.

In Centre and Mifflin counties, a heavy storm dropped an inch or more last Monday night. It helped the corn. But in the south, most places got little more than a dust-settler.

In Lancaster County, the open house field day at the Penn State Southeast Research Farm at Landisville next Thursday has been cancelled.

Even with irrigation, truck farmers literally are still feeling the heat.

Yields in irrigated plots in Delaware will only be mediocre. Without irrigation, forget it.

The heat is taking its toll in the watermelon and cantaloupe patches and potato yields are only fair. Soybeans are nearing the critical stage.

Non-irrigated field corn yields may be in the 15 to 25-bushel category.

The dry weather takes its toll in vegetable fields in a number of different ways.

Vegetable specialists at Rutgers in New Jersey report a lot of trouble with birds in their tomato trial plots.

"It's so dry everywhere that the birds are coming in and pecking at the tomatoes just to get moisture," they report.

Some sweet corn may develop small ears and other varieties won't even yield.

There's lots of blossom drop on tomatoes and peppers aren't setting fruit.

York County commissioners declared the county an agricultural disaster area, during their weekly meeting Wednesday morning.

Designation of the county as lands as disaster struck with an estimated \$45.8 million loss to

farmers, paves the way for the filing to state and national government agencies for possible low-interest loans and feed grain assistance.

"Terrible," is how county agent Tony Dobrosky sums up the York ag situation. Lack of sufficient rainfall, plus extreme heat and searing breezes, have sucked available moisture from the vital top inches of the normally-productive York County soils, and dried stalks and stems to a withered gray.

Dairy production is down between ten and twenty percent, Dobrosky estimates, and poultry producers are reeling under an approximate \$3.9 million loss in egg production and weigh gains in their flocks.

Both beef and hog producers are losing daily on the decreased weight of gain seen on livestock.

"Ane even if it cooled down immediately, it would take from ten days to two weeks for livestock to begin gaining again," said Dobrosky in a telephone interview following the disaster area declaration.

Largest crop losses will be from corn, the county's most widely-grown grain. Loss estimate on the dried up corn fields stands at \$9 million. Another \$1.25 million loss is anticipated on soybean plantings.

Also suffering from the worst drought in about two decades are the county's fruit growers, with the late crops of peaches and apples hardest hit. Dobrosky estimates those losses at somewhere in the \$300,000 range.

Thus, from the sandy loam soils of the vegetable fields to the shaley corn land of Lancaster Farming country, the drought is taking its toll.

And, combined with PIK, it will be a one-two punch that's going to hit livestock feeders, as well as the consumer's pocketbook, for quite a few months to come.



Discussing drought disaster in parched cornfield are, from left, State Ag Sec. Penrose Hollowell, Glenn Kimmel, Cumberland County ASCS director; and Enola farmer Paul Wise.

Field day cancelled

LANDISVILLE — Due to the lack of rain, John Yocum, Superintendent, of Penn State's Southeastern Field Research Laboratory cancelled the planned Field Day on Thursday.

The Laboratory received only 0.28 inches of rainfall during July.

The lack of rainfall has eliminated many of the expected experimental treatment effects, and many of the crops are only half the size they should be at this time. For these reasons, the Field Day will be cancelled for this year.

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