

A wet April

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mushroom and Mallard duck conditions.

"I like to start planting corn by April 25," laments Cochranville farmer, Paul King, "but this year's weather is really holding us up. Even after the rain stops, we'll need two good drying days before we can get started."

John Yocum, senior research associate with Penn State's Department of Agronomy, concurs, but notes that a three or four day period during the week of April 9, did allow farmers to do some small grain seeding earlier this month. He reports that oats were planted at the University's research facility near Manheim on April 12.

Yocum also notes that many of our wet periods were comprised of light, misty rain, leading everyone to believe that we've received more rain than has actually fallen. Thus far this month Yocum reports 3.74 inches of rainfall. With only two days left in the month, chances of approaching last April's oceanic 9.85 inches of precipitation are slim, indeed.

Though farmers in the Southeast aren't in trouble at this point, with respect to planting, the wet stuff has certainly brought soil

preparation and manure spreading nearly to a standstill, notes Lancaster County extension director, Jay Irwin.

"Farmers may find themselves working around the clock once the weather breaks," Irwin predicts, adding that equipment such as corn planters should be serviced and ready to roll to avoid further delays.

A look to the west finds Somerset County farmers in much the same straits, with much plowing yet to be done, and very little oats planted.

"It snowed here today, and Sunday's freezing rain knocked down a number of trees and powerlines in our area," remarked Somerset County agent, Bob Antram, during a phone conversation on Thursday. "We like to have our corn in by the third week in May," Antram adds, "so we're not in bad shape with corn at this point, but most of our oats get planted in early April, and we just haven't had the weather to get the job done yet."

A talk with Crawford County agent, Joe Beard, reveals that northwestern Pa. farmers are in the same boat, with very little field work being done.

"It's been as cold as 25° here at night during the past two weeks, and I'd say we're about two weeks

behind schedule," estimates Beard. The agent says that Crawford County corn is usually planted by the middle of May, adding that in wet years, such as this, it's not uncommon to see corn and oats going into the ground at the same time. Beard also observes that many area farmers have delayed purchasing seed and fertilizers because of financial stress, and he expresses concern over the logistical problems created with everyone attempting to purchase and apply bulk fertilizers at the last minute.

Likewise, no one seems to be ahead of schedule in the north country. Like Joe Beard, Bradford County agent, Al Homan, finds his farmers to be about two weeks behind schedule.

"A few no-till seedings have been made, but that hasn't amounted to much more than 30 acres," Homan reports. "Usually by this time there's been a good bit of planting in the (Susquehanna) river bottomlands, but this year there's still plenty of plowing to do."

So Mother Nature, if you're listening, we farmers aren't complaining about the size of this spring's delivery, but we'd like to suggest that a few bugs need to be worked out in the distribution system. Could we, maybe, accept just a partial delivery now, and back-order the balance until, say, July and August?



April showers collect on a terraced cornfield owned by Paul King, of Cochranville. Planting throughout much of the state has been delayed up to two weeks due to persistent showers.



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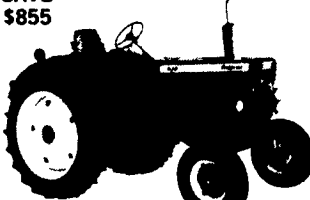
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