

Diagnosing Downed Corn Can Be Frustrating

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Harvesting corn that has fallen down can be a real frustration, especially when you're trying to make time during the busy harvest season.

Like one farmer recently told me, when there are two tractor trailers waiting to be filled at the edge of the field and the weather is uncertain, you don't want to have to be running the combine at one mile an hour because the corn is down. So it's not surprising that standability is an important consideration for many farmers in assessing their hybrids and other management practices.

Early fall is an excellent time to assess lodging problems in corn, for two reasons. One, you can make harvest plans that take into consideration fields that might have downed corn problems and, two, you can learn what caused the problem to avoid it in the future.

If you identify fields that have a potential lodging problem early in the fall, they should be harvested as early as possible to avoid more serious problems and increased harvest losses. Downed corn is more subject to animal damage and ear molds.

Corn lodges for four basic reasons: root lodging, stalk rots, European corn borer damage, or corn rootworm damage. Each of these could be a factor in fields this fall, but the management to avoid these problems in the future is different so it pays to identify the problems before harvest.

Root lodging occurs when a poor root system develops, the soil gets wet in the fall, and windy conditions uproot the crop. The poor root development can be associated with some hybrids and is also associated with dry conditions in July, as many areas experienced this year.

Generally the root system is not injured but is small. This problem can also be present in wet years when corn root systems are relatively shallow. Most seed companies provide a root rating for their hybrids. If the root lodging is more than an isolated case, consider switching to a hybrid with stronger roots.

Corn rootworm damage appears similar to root lodging in that the plants are sometimes uprooted, but often this is accompanied by the goosenecked plants that lodged earlier in the season. Roots will also show signs of corn rootworm injury, chewed-off roots, or root tips. Often, you may have to wash the root system to find these symptoms late in the season. Corn rootworm damage has been common this year but usually only in corn following corn. If this problem is common, consider more crop rotations or reevaluate your soil insecticide program.

Stalk rot also can be a common cause of downed corn, especially following a stressful late season with cloudy weather, leaf diseases, or nutrient deficiencies. Stalk rot usually causes the stalk to bend and break below the ear and is caused by one or more fungi weakening the tissues in the lower portion of the stalk. Often the pith in the lower stalk will be nearly gone and discolored — either pink or gray. Sometimes the stalk will appear black as well. Stalk rot is often associated with gray leaf spot, so selecting hybrids with good tolerance to gray leaf spot may be necessary.

Stalk rot can also be related to low soil potassium levels or excessive plant populations. Stalk rot can also be managed through hybrid selection, since hybrids also vary in their resistance to various stalk rots.

European corn borer damage is another cause of downed corn. Often plants will break over at or below the ear. There will usually be signs of corn borer waste or frass near the break and splitting a few stalks will usually reveal signs of the corn borer tunneling. All fields will have some corn borers, but when you find more than 1-2 borers per plant, this is often associated with a significant lodging or a yield loss problem. Damage is often most severe on late-planted fields. Management of this pest is best accomplished using Bt hybrids on high-risk fields.

If you encounter some downed corn this fall, take some time to

evaluate the problem or, at a minimum, take a few plant samples to share with your crop

adviser. Careful identification can help to get the problem cor-

rected and avoid blaming the wrong cause.

Corn Refiners Disappointed

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The Corn Refiners Association is very disappointed with the recent decision by Mexico's Trade Ministry to impose tariffs on corn syrup imported from the United States.


In doing so, the Mexican government turned its back on the North American Free Trade Agreement, which was established to ensure easy import and export access between the United States, Mexico and Canada.

CRA President Charles F. Conner stated, "Unfortunately, Mexico's Commerce Department (SECOFI) has based its investigation into imports of U.S. high fructose corn syrup (HFCS) on false allegations from the Mexican Sugar Chamber."

In a meeting with SECOFI representatives on June 6, the Corn Refiners Association expressed hope that any decision on HFCS would be made according to NAFTA and WTO

requirements. This has not been the case.


The Corn Refiners Association will continue to cooperate with Mexico in resolving this investigation. Conner said, "The CRA is confident that SECOFI continues to support the spirit of NAFTA and free trade between Mexico and the United States and we urge them to brush aside the political pressures from those elements in Mexico that fear fair competition from U.S. corn."



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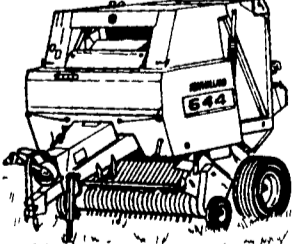


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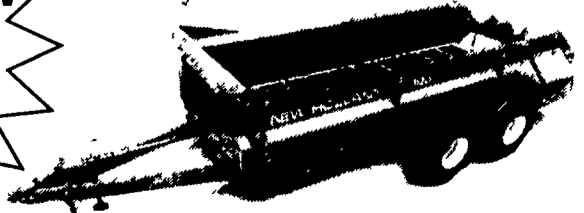
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