

# Mild Winter, Wet Spring Challenges Crop Protection Strategies

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corn planting may have already cost some bushel yield for some. He said May 10 probably should have been the cutoff, but that was not a possibility for many.

It really wasn't until this week that many fields were dry enough to drive into with a tractor without being very seriously concerned about compaction.

Other than compaction, working a too-wet field can result in long term crop losses for other reasons.

In some cases, Voight pointed out that some soil was obviously too wet when corn was planted, and the ground covering the seed didn't close or hold closed behind the seeding disc.

But insects and weeds have grown tremendously quickly. In some cases, no-till corn fields have been covered with almost a foot-thick mat of the winter annual chickweed, and stands of thistle have grown to 2 feet.

Voight said farmers should consider rethinking some of their planting decisions, and maybe even seed choices.

Herbicide choices and application strategies should most likely be modified also.

On the other hand, some look at the situation as not so bad.

One farmer who has been battling encroaching burcucumber, said that the situation presents another opportunity to put a dent in the reproduction of the corn-strangling weed.



Lebanon County Extension Agronomy Agent Delbert Voight kneels in a no-till corn field overrun with weeds. Next to him is part of a patch of thistle, and the pennycress, part of the mustard family, is highlighted in front, while a lot of the ground cover is a thick mat of chickweed.



Jimsonweed has been a problem weed for some time, but especially in some regions. A poisonous plant, Lebanon County Extension Agent Delbert Voight shows three aspects of the plant worth noting: the decaying, yet still prickly seed case from last year's adult; the small, dark, irregularly shaped seed on his finger, and the young sprout.

He said that last year's wet spring and early growth of weeds allowed him to kill and plow the

weeds down before they went to seed, and he was able to plant his corn.

The corn got started well, but while a late summer drought hurt the corn crop for many throughout the state, this particular farmer has some low lying fields that retain soil moisture.

The corn was able to tap into that, while any further germination of burcucumber was left to wilt before going to seed.

He said the current weather patterns and delayed field work may well work to his continuing advantage against burcucumber, by being able to kill off the emerged weeds and planting soon.

Instead of just thinking about the type of herbicides to order, the farmer is using an Integrated Pest Management-type strategy — understand the life cycle of pests, and then discover windows of opportunity to disrupt those life cycles, while at the same time getting field work done and the crop planted and growing.

Dr. William Curran, a weed expert and researcher with Penn State University Agronomy Department who also conducts weed research at the Penn State

Southeast Research Farm in Landisville (Lancaster County), said he sees a number of different weed-control scenarios resulting from the weather so far.

However, he said that farmers should not be discouraged from these early challenges.

"Keep in mind we different situations every year, and, three or four days from now, things could be on a more positive note," he said. "So, remain optimistic, it's early in the season yet."

Curran said of the situations he's been observing, the rain has been a common factor.

"One of the main things I'm seeing, the guys who got their corn planted early and got all that rain, we're going to see the preemergence pesticide wear out."

He said that with rainfall coming in 3- to 4-inch doses, that the preemergent herbicides "probably leached below the weed germination zone, in some cases.

"Of course, some of the guys who planted didn't get (back into fields to spray the preemergent crop protection), and are now dealing with big weeds as big or bigger than corn. For no-till it's worse off.

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A member of the Composite Family? Regardless, it's but one of a variety of weeds — any unintended plant — that have been so far able to escape control measures in some crop fields because of wet weather delays and advanced growing degree day accumulation.



After being delayed from getting into fields to get this year's crop seed planted, and with weeds getting started as early as January in some cases, this no-till field will have plenty of surface residue once the weeds are "burned" down. That can help greatly should dry weather occur later in the summer.