

Ohio Rootworm Damage Could Be High This Year

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Water-logged fields in southern Ohio could likely see crop injury and potential yield losses because of excessive rains in June that flooded very young corn plants.

Corn is especially vulnerable if floodwaters cover the crop for

more than two days when the plant's growing point is below the soil surface, which is prior to the leaf collar stage or growth stage six, said Peter Thomison, an agronomist with Ohio State University. After 48 hours of flooding, the oxygen supply is usually de-

pleted in the soil, and the plant cannot perform critical life functions.

Those kinds of conditions occurred in low-lying areas of southern Ohio's Jackson County, leaving farmers with some tough management decisions in waning mo-

ments of the planting season, said the county's extension agent Dave Samples.

"In our major creek bottoms, we have several places where water was over the corn for four days," Samples said.

Although excessive rainfall was unwelcome in southern Ohio as well as other parts of the water-weary Midwest, it broke a month-long dry spell in northwestern Ohio, one of the state's major crop production areas.

"Even where you had too much rain and there were pockets of ponding, the rest of the field really benefited," said Paul Houdashelt, manager of the Northwestern Branch of Ohio State's Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center in Wood County.

"We really needed the rainfall," Houdashelt said.

Ohio's No. 1 wheat, corn and soybean production county is Wood County. Neighboring counties consistently rank in the state's top 10 annual production for those crops.

As for farmers in water-logged areas such as Jackson County, Samples said they might consider replanting to shorter-season corn varieties, which take less time to reach maturity than earlier-planted corn. But time is fast running out in the planting season for any corn variety to reach maximum yield potential by fall. Farmers may also consider switching to soybean as long as their corn herbicide program is compatible with the crop, he said.

Corn planted with no-till or reduced-tillage practices on upland soils escaped flooding and are generally better off than crops in low-lying areas, Samples said. No-till and reduced-tillage practices are conservation methods that minimize soil losses to wind and water erosion.

Jackson County had a weekend reprieve from wet conditions June 19 to June 20, although other parts of the state got rainfall, Samples said. By June 22, the county had gone four days without rain, he said.

"The wheat is coming along real nicely," Samples said. "As for soybeans, the crops that are on better-drained soils are doing all right, but are still pale. The beans that saw water impounding are stunted, and we sustained losses there."

Thomison said that corn's chances for surviving a flood are better when the growing point is above the soil surface and also if temperatures are less than 77 degrees F during flooding.

"Since some of the corn in southern Ohio that was subjected to saturated soil conditions had not yet reached the six-leaf stage, there is potential for flooding and ponding injury," Thomison said.

Even if corn plants survive flooding, farmers' problems aren't over yet, Thomison said. The crop can see some longer-term production problems later in the growing season. A disease known as crazy top is a common problem in a wet year, and hybrids have limited resistance, Thomison said.

Symptoms of crazy top are rolling leaves or the proliferation of husks due to abnormal tissue growth. The fungus causing crazy top depends on saturated soils to infect corn seedlings, resulting in abnormal tissue development.

"That's been the potential characteristic in this bottom ground when you get the water over the corn," Samples said. "But corn smut seems to be more of a problem here than crazy top."

In addition excessive moisture during early growth stages can retard corn root development, Thomison said. If the weather turns dry, the roots will not be developed enough to reach deep into the soil moisture reserves.

Too much rain can also affect nitrogen fertilizers that farmers applied to their fields. "Flooding and ponding can also result in losses of nitrogen through denitrification and leaching," he said.

Farmers who suspect flooding injury can visually check the color of plants' growing points for damage potential, Thomison said. A darkened or softened growing point precedes plant death, while a white or cream-colored growing point indicate a healthy plant. To be sure, check fields for new leaf growth three to five days after water drains away.

The Ohio Agricultural Statistics Service reported that Ohio precipitation is almost two inches above normal for the growing season starting April 1. The state received 11.94 inches for the growing season as of June 21, the service reported. High-moisture regions are the southwest, west central and south central, which exceeded the precipitation norm, respectively, by 7.93 inches, 4.07 inches and 3.66 inches.

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