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We are now moving into summer, the main season for vegetable production. As usual, the weather has been anything but ordinary. First we had cool, wet weather, then hot and dry, then hot and wet, and now we're back to hot and dry. An next week - who knows?

Unfortunately, these variations in the weather make it difficult for you to produce a high quality crop. When we have these types of variable conditions your attention to detail will affect the ultimate quality of the crop.

Hot, dry weather will require you to pay close attention to the water status of your fields. Alternating periods of excessively wet and then hot and dry weather will stress your plants because it will affect root growth. During the wet periods root growth will be reduced because the plants will have adequate water with only a small root area.

However, when the weather suddenly turns hot and dry this small mass of roots will not be able to supply the water that the plant needs. So watch your fields closely this week and next for the early signs of water stress and apply water before growth is slowed and yields are reduced.

When you do irrigate be sure to water thoroughly. Drip irrigation

allows water to be applied at a rate that will be readily absorbed by the soil. If you are using overhead irrigation be sure to apply the water at a rate that will allow it to be absorbed into the soil rather than running off. Maximum irrigation rates are 0.40 inch per hour for sandy soils, 0.30 inch per hour for loamy soils, and 0.20 inch per hour for clay soils.

Blotchy Ripening of Greenhouse Tomatoes Blotchy ripening of tomatoes in greenhouses is a frustrating experience for tomato growers. Every spring I receive calls from growers asking how to solve this problem.

Unfortunately, blotchy ripening can be caused by several factors including excessive heat, high humidity, low light levels and low potassium levels. Some varieties are more likely to experience this problem as well. What should you do if you are having this problem? The first thing to do is to have a tissue test to determine if low levels of potassium are to blame. This is the most common cause of blotchy ripening and the easiest to solve.

Environmental factors such as temperature and humidity are not easily controlled and you need to minimize the effects of these factors by variety selection. For greenhouse production of tomatoes you should plant varieties developed to grow in a greenhouse. Examples are Trust, President, and Match.

Some people don't want to grow greenhouse varieties because they are afraid that these types have less taste than regular varieties. However, these newer cultivars produce a very high quality tomato and I would encourage you to try one or more of these varieties if you are having problems with uneven ripening.

Late Blight and Early Blight of Tomatoes. The potential exists to have problems with Late Blight this year. There have already been documented cases of Late Blight in Pennsylvania, New York, and Ohio.

There is the possibility that more Late Blight is present in PA because of the large number of potatoes that overwintered in harvested fields from last year. Our mild winter did not kill these tubers as it normally would have so the potential for more Late Blight inoculum is greater because it survives in overwintering tubers.

Growers are advised to scout tomato and potato fields regularly during weather favorable for the development of this potentially devastating disease.

Weather conditions have already been favorable for Early Blight development on early-planted tomatoes in Lancaster county. Dr. Alan MacNab of the Pathology Department at Penn State is advising a fungicide application to tomatoes planted in early to mid-May.

Fields planted after mid-May should if crop rotation is being practiced and fields are scouted regularly. Growers can receive the latest disease updates by calling the PDA's hotline at 1-800-PENN-IPM. You need a touch tone phone to utilize these reports.

Sweet Corn IPM

Sweet corn growers who planted for the early market are harvesting some of the earliest corn they have ever grown, thanks to our warmer-than-normal spring. However, this same warm weather is also resulting in the early appearance of corn carworms.

Normally these pests have to migrate up from the warmer southern areas but this year they are already in our area. Fortunately, the population is currently below damaging levels. However, I advise growers to follow the population levels of both corn earworm and European corn borer, our regular early-season pest.

Scout fields regularly for these pests, especially during corn silking, and adjust your spray schedules appropriately. You can also receive an updated report on the trap catches of the corn pests by calling the PDA hotline mentioned above.

Harvest Procedures

Finally, growers should strive to preserve the quality present at

harvest in their produce by following proper harvest and handling procedures

First, harvest your crops at the proper maturity for your market. Zucchini should be small and tender while cantaloupes should be harvested at half-slip to full slip to have the best taste. Harvest in the cool of morning whenever possible and move harvested produce to a cool, shaded location as soon as possible.

Store any harvested produce for the shortest time necessary. The sooner you get your produce to market or the consumer, the better their eating experience will be. And always handle produce like the delicate commodity it is. Avoid drops, bruising and any rough handling procedures. The extra care you take when harvesting and handling your produce will result in more satisfied buyers and more return sales for you.

Tim Elkner

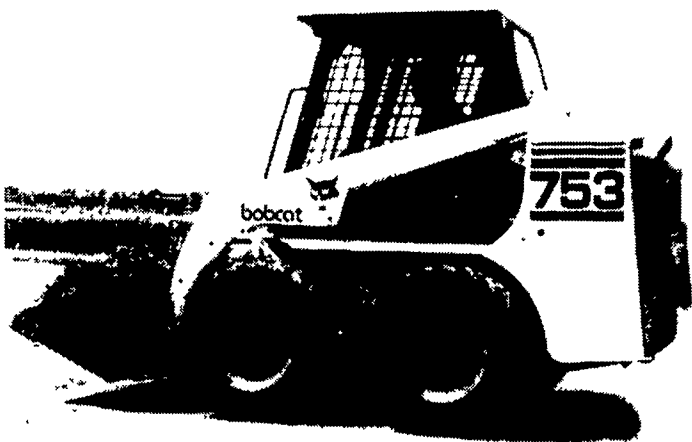
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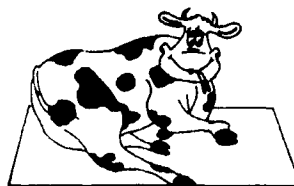
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