

Thumbs-Up For Crops Despite Performance Challenges

COLUMBUS, Ohio — With late plantings, excessive rainfall, a myriad of insects and diseases and poor plant development, it seemed Ohio corn and soybean growers would be throwing in the towel on another disappointing season.

But to the surprise of many, Ohio's top agronomic crops are outperforming expectations with record yields projected. According to the Ohio Agricultural Statistics Service, as of Sept. 1 the corn harvest was projected at 145 bushels per acre. If the number stays true, it would make it Ohio's second-highest harvest in history — behind the 147 bushels per acre harvested in 2000. Soybean yields are projected at 44 bushels per acre, nearly an all-time high. By comparison, Ohio growers harvested 88 bushels per acre of corn and 30 bushels per acre of soybeans last year.

Only a small percentage of the crops have been harvested so far, but Ohio State University agronomists like what they see.

"The soybean crop is a bit of a surprise. The crop is turning out better than expected despite the weather and diseases," said Ohio State Extension agronomist Jim Beuerlein. "Every time we go

through one of these years we are amazed at the resiliency of the soybean crop."

Excessive rainfall throughout much of the growing season did little to impact the crop's development. Early-planted fields (late April through May) are pulling off 40-plus bushel-per-acre yields. Soybeans planted after June 15 may have been damaged by the earlier-than-normal frost that hit Ohio the beginning of October. The later the planting, the greater the loss due to frost, said Beuerlein.

"Overall, we had a lot of good things happen to us that's no weeds, good stands and despite a lot of rain, it was good rainfall distribution," Beuerlein said.

Rains did bring disease, and soybeans were plagued with plenty of pathogens. Even so, the crop performed well, said Ohio State plant pathologist Anne Dorrance.

"It was a very challenging year in that samples we received had more than one pathogen associated with it," said Dorrance, with the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center in Wooster, Ohio. "But all these pathogens tend to be associated with poor drainage, something that growers can remedy by adjusting drain tiles or taking measures to reduce compaction."

In addition to the common Phytophthora root rot, soybeans were also affected by Sclerotinia stem rot, a disease not seen in Ohio for several years, and sudden death syndrome, present in more acres this year than ever recorded.

"We had all these diseases out there, and in some areas there are dead spots and the beans are stunted and not maturing, but overall the bean fields look fairly good," said Dorrance. "Soybeans have an interesting ability to compensate for lost neighbors. They will get very bushy and take up the space where other plants have been. So at 100,000 plants per acre you will get yield equal to what you would get at 200,000 plants per acre."

Dorrance said wise selection of varieties with a good resistance package to many of the plant pathogens helped boost the crop from under dire environmental conditions. But growers now need to look to next year.

"What we've done is increase the population of pathogens in those fields for next year," said Dorrance. "So the next thing growers need to do is to rotate their crops. Wheat is an excellent crop to put in those soybean fields. It helps to change the flora

and reduces the population of soybean cyst nematode, as well as prevents the rapid increase of Phytophthora."

For those growers who are unable to get wheat in the ground, planting corn or alfalfa makes a good substitute.

The corn crop is also faring well, according to Ohio State agronomist Peter Thomison. "With the environmental conditions we've had, the corn is turning out to be better than we had expected," he said.

The crop continues to be about a week behind in development due to late planting and a shallow root system, but some of the major issues concerning agronomists have yet to become widespread problems.

"Maturity is one issue we are concerned about because of the fairly cool growing season. The crop has not accumulated as many heat units as we would have liked it to," said Thomison. "But the crop is showing what some of Ohio State's research has supported: that corn plants when planted on late dates can accommodate a shorter growing season by maturing with fewer heat units."

Another issue is how fast the corn will dry down due to the

late-season rains and continued soggy soils. "Surprisingly, a lot of the cornfields planted later than normal and wetter than normal have been drying down faster than expected," said Thomison.

But he urged growers to harvest corn as quickly as possible to avoid any problems with stalk quality.

"A lot of fields are standing well, but we know there is stalk rot in these fields because of the rains we had during the growing season. If you pinch the lower nodes some stalks will collapse very easily," said Thomison. "It won't take much for heavy winds or heavy rains to blow the stalks over, so we are encouraging growers to get out there as soon as possible and earmark those fields which they think they may have problems with."

Northern corn leaf blight, anthracnose stalk rot and top die-back are just some diseases that have predisposed the corn crop to stalk quality problems.

The early frost may also have impacted late-planted corn, said Thomison. The extent of the injury to the corn plants is still not known and how well the crop will yield because of the damage remains a wildcard.

Custom Operators Database Expanded To Cover Five States

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — A website that connects agricultural and dairy producers with custom operators in Pennsylvania has been expanded to include information on service providers in four more states.

The Custom Operators Database (<http://cod.aers.psu.edu>) now features details on services offered by custom operators in New York, Vermont, Ohio, and Maryland, in addition to Penn-

sylvania. The Custom Operators Database was developed by Sarah Roth, extension associate in farm business management with Dairy Alliance, a Penn State Cooperative Extension initiative. The database allows farmers to search for custom agricultural operators who offer the specific services they need. Custom operators from Pennsylvania, New York, Vermont, Ohio, and Maryland

can now register their business information with the database to let producers know what is available.


"Farmers who have thought of hiring a custom operator but don't know anyone can use the site as a search tool," Roth explained. "For custom operators,

this is another place to market their information before potential new clients."

The database allows searches by county among nine categories of animal services, including dry-transition cow housing and three sub-categories of heifer raising, each based on growth stages. Searches can also be conducted under nine categories of crop services, including harvesting,


grinding/shredding, and wrapping round bales, and seven other services, among them brush hogging, fencing, and skid loading.

For more information about the Custom Operators Database, contact Sarah Roth by phone at (814) 863-8645 or by e-mail at sarahroth@psu.edu.



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