

2015 Difficult Crop Year

By Ed Lentz – OSU Extension, Hancock County

Farmers in the area have had to face a difficult and challenging year to grow crops. The excessive and continual rainfall in June and July damaged many of the crop fields.

Farmers needed five to seven days of good growing conditions to fully evaluate the extent of the damage. They did not have those five to seven days until the latter part of July; thus the area did not see five good growing days from late May until late July.

Farmers were fortunate that when the wet period finally ended temperatures were moderate and gradually returned to summertime heat. This allowed some marginal plants to recover. If temperatures had become hot (above 90°F) right away, the weakened root systems would not have been able to keep up with water demands.

Farmers were also fortunate that a significant rainfall fell last mid-week. Root systems in most fields have been damaged from the two months of water-saturated soils and are slowly recovering. An extended dry period may be too much for these weakened roots.

The area has some good corn fields but also has a large amount of corn that will be unable to recover from the wet June and July. Root systems were too damaged from lack of oxygen to fully recover even with better growing conditions.

Fields of short and stunted plants are evidence of this damage. The weakened roots are unable to provide adequate nutrients from the soil for proper growth. Nitrogen deficiency is common causing plants to have pale and yellow leaves.

Even some current healthy looking corn fields may not have adequate nitrogen for the rest of the season because of earlier excessive water. This nitrogen may have been leached by water or the farmer was unable to apply more at the appropriate time because of the wet conditions.

Corn plants have some ability to remobilize nitrogen within the plant if it was able to store it in the stalks and lower leaves early in the season. It will move this stored nitrogen if the roots have been damaged too much to move enough nitrogen from the soil or soil nitrogen levels are too low because of the excessive rainfall.

However, the June-July rains may have allowed little nitrogen to be stored. As nitrogen is remobilized, lower leaves will first turn yellow, then brown, and then completely die. The amount of yellow to brown lower corn leaves in the area is evident that plants are having trouble getting adequate nitrogen.

Similar to corn, there are some good soybean fields but also large areas that will not recover from the wet June and July. Soybeans have less tolerance to saturated fields than corn.

Soybean plants died in areas that were flooded for several days. Areas that were not flooded but had water-saturated soils for an extended period can now be seen as stunted plants. Plants that are currently stunted probably will not have ability to produce enough new growth for new flowers because of damaged root systems.

Soybeans also lost their ability to fix nitrogen during the wet June and July. Oxygen needed by the bacteria to fix nitrogen was unavailable because of the water-saturated soils. This resulted in the yellow soybean plants in the area.

Soybean plants that did not have extensive root damage started to respond with the return of better growing conditions. However, yields in these fields will still be reduced since the plants were not growing for at least two to three week during the wet weather.

Wheat harvest is over in the area. The wet June and July was a disaster for the wheat crop. Farmers who were able to harvest the 4th of July weekend had a crop but yields were reduced from foliar disease and lack of sunshine during grain field.

Farmers who were unable to harvest at this time had to wait two to three weeks later because of wet field conditions. This delayed harvest caused major grain quality issue, such as sprouting and reduced test weights. These farmers received much less for their wheat because of quality issues.

Vomitoxin also increased in fields because of the wet June and delayed harvest. Some farmers were unable to sell their wheat because of vomitoxin levels. Grain quality became such a factor that some elevators only took grain from their members and others quit taking wheat after early July.

In summary, 2015 is becoming a difficult year for all grain farmers. Wheat has already been harvested with the majority of the crop being of poor quality and low yields. Wheat seed will be limited this fall raising seed costs. The past poor crop and limited seed may further decrease the amount of wheat grown in the area.

There is still time for some of the corn and soybean fields to yield well. It will depend on timely rains during August and early September and good weather conditions at harvest.

However, many corn and soybean fields have been severely damaged by the excessive June and July rains. Yields have already been greatly reduced in these fields and some may be abandoned.

Grain quality will be a concern in all fields since plants have already been severely stressed early in the season. Stalk and ear rots may be a bigger problem this fall in corn. Farmers will use all their skills and experience to salvage what they can from this year's corn and soybean crop.