

Downpours have left farmers facing drought conditions

By DONNA KELL
Herald Staff

The combines roll through the fields of hay, grinding their blades against lengthy stalks. It's August, in Halton Hills, and harvesting of crops is an ongoing process. But this year, even without the severe drought conditions of the summer of 1988, farmers are looking at disappointing yields.

"As farmers, we're really at the mercy of the weather," said Norval farmer and president of the Halton Federation of Agriculture, Harry Brander.

The weather this year brought 141 mm of precipitation in June, unlike last year where the entire month was dry. But the June rain has fallen too hard and too fast to help crops.

This year, "the ground was baked like a rock," said Tenth Line cash crop farmer Bill Brander.

"Overall, we've had more rain this year because it was so wet in June. But it was heavy downpours. That's why the corn is (growing) so uneven," said Harry Brander.

Corn, winter wheat, barley and oats have all been affected by this year's rain pattern. Heavy rains for a short period of time don't penetrate the soil.

"It just rolls off the soil, into the creeks and ponds," Bill Brander said.

Cattle have been turning up their noses at the poor quality of hay harvested recently. Ministry of Agriculture and Food representative Phyllis MacMaster said there are concerns that the hay does not contain enough nutrition for the livestock.

"I'm having quite a job getting my cattle to accept it," said Bill Brander's son Harry, who owns a farm on Winston Churchill Boulevard. He said cattle that usually eat five round bales of hay

each week are down to only two bales.

The livestock are also fed corn silage.

Hay usually produces three cuttings a season. This year is better than last year because there will be two cuttings for most farmers, and there could be three cuttings for some.

But Bill Brander's second cutting of hay produced only half the yield of a normal cutting. The rain in June kept farmers from combining their hay crops. The later harvesting of a first crop meant a late harvesting of a second cutting.

Limehouse farmer Frank Anthony said last year's second hay cuttings produced as little as 25 per cent of a regular harvest.

Corn cobs will be smaller this year and the stalks are all of different lengths. More rain this month could help them, said Mrs. MacMaster, but the crucial time for corn crops has already passed.

"The corn was coming out and tasseling in the last two weeks," said Harry Brander.

"It's going to be lighter. Especially in the later-planted corn."

Some farmers were held back from planting in June because of wet fields. And the variable rain caused the different sizes of corn stalks. Stalks on Bill Brander's farm range from two to five feet in height.

Winter wheat isn't yielding as much as it was a year ago, Bill Brander said.

His son agreed: "The wheat looked good this year, but the yields have really been variable."

The barley crop this year was "excellent," he said, but the weight is lower than it should be. Normally about 40 to 45 pounds per bushel, barley is weighing in at a paltry 38 pounds.

"It seems to be the same problem with the oats," Harry Brander added. Some are coming in at 26 pounds per bushel when they should weigh about 36 pounds per bushel.

"The oats are pretty well a disaster," added the Tenth Line farmer.

Soybean crops suffered this year because farmers couldn't get out to plant them in the wet fields, said Harry Brander.

On the surface, it seemed this year's rain would have helped the harvests. "The yields look good, from what we've heard," Mrs. MacMaster said.

And "the yields were excellent," she added, but "the quality just wasn't there."

The precipitation in June didn't stop at just rain. One day a hail storm ripped at the corn fields on Harry Brander's farm, damaging the leaves.

The same hail pellets destroyed the apple orchard of a neighbor on Winston Churchill Boulevard.

"It just looked like someone took a lead bullet and shot it into the apples seven or eight times," Mr. Brander said.

The weather, unpredictable at a drier 70 to 100 mm in July, hasn't helped Halton Hills crops much, he said.

"In a way, it's not really any better than last year. The rain has been all downpours - and all at the wrong times!"

Immunization clinic

The Halton Regional Health Department is holding immunization clinics on the second Tuesday of each month alternating between the Georgetown office at 93 Main St. S. in Georgetown and the Milton office at 251 Main St.

For more information call 877-2238.

Five charged with impaired driving

Halton Regional Police arrested five people on impaired driving charges in Halton Hills last week and warned another two drivers to sober up before getting back into their cars this long weekend.

Police stopped a Quebec man, 37, at a Guelph Street spot check around 11:30 p.m. last Wednesday. The man allegedly failed a roadside breathalyzer test and underwent further testing at the local precinct. He will appear in court on impaired driving charges Sept. 11.

A man police say allegedly tried to avoid a Guelph Street spot check location was arrested and charged with impaired driving early Saturday morning. Police stopped the Quebec man, 46, at 1:40 a.m. He will appear for a bail hearing August 8th.

Police charged two men in Acton with impaired driving after one had allegedly "passed out" at the wheel. The second man was trying to help him when police arrived on

the scene, they say. The two cars driven by an Acton man, 49, and a Georgetown man, 50, were parked on Mill Street, around 1:30 a.m. Saturday. The Georgetown man will attend a bail hearing Aug. 8. The Acton man will appear in court Sept. 11.

A Huttonville man was charged with impaired driving Aug. 6, police say. The man, 36, was pulled over at a Guelph Street spot check. He faces charges of refusing to take a breath test and of impaired driving. He will appear in court Sept. 11.

Police handed out two 12-hour suspensions Aug. 6 at a spot check location. One was given at 1:40 a.m. A second suspension was issued at 10:40 p.m. Under a 12-hour suspension the driver blows a "warn" on the ALERT (Alcohol Level Evaluation Road Tester) issued by police, is not charged with impaired driving but cannot drive a car for the next 12 hours.

"Town Hall" meetings start next week

If you have something to say about the federal government's policies you'll have your chance three times in the coming weeks.

Halton Peel MP Garth Turner has scheduled a series of town hall meetings throughout the riding and three are scheduled for Halton Hills. The first, takes place at the Acton Town Hall on Aug. 16. The second will be held at the Terra Cotta Town Hall on Aug. 29 and the third will be held at the Elks Lodge Hall in Norval on Sept. 6. All three meetings start at 7:30 p.m.

Mr. Turner has also scheduled meetings for Nassagaweya, Burlington, Palgrave, Terra Cotta and Belfountain.

"You'll be able to participate in an open question and answer session where you can ask me any question you want", Mr. Turner said in announcing the meetings.

"Your might not agree with what I have to say but you will know where I stand and more importantly, I'll know what you have to say."

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