

Hot, dry weather hampered crops but local farmers remain optimistic

Some rain would help corn crop

By Rebecca Ring

This summer has been hot and dry and nobody knows that better than farmers like Tony Van Tol.

In Rockwood, Van Tol's name is synonymous with delicious sweet corn sold at a stand on Main St. However, farming 450 acres between Guelph and West Garafraxa with brother Rob, Van Tol knows a lot more than corn.

"Fields are like people. No two are exactly the same. Spots where rain fell will have higher than average yields, and areas that are sandy or have had less rain fall will be below average," he says.

Van Tol's crops consist of soybeans, grain corn, winter wheat, and cranberry beans, commonly called Romano beans. He says soybeans suffered the most from the dry season.

"Soy beans don't like extremely hot summers," he says "They're under stress and aphids and other insects flourish. In dry weather, the aphid population expands and there is no rain to wash them off the plants. The lady beetles have been slow to catch up. It's nice to see natural predators like the lady beetle larva or parasitic wasps taking care of the aphids for the most part. Some of the fields needed help though, so about one-third were sprayed."

Van Tol expects that yield will be half to three-quarters of normal yields. "It depends on the field and field history. We're optimistic though. We'll go out with our combines and hope to fill the bins. Nobody knows until we're out there," he says.

Their first crop was winter wheat in July. Van Tol was happy with the yield, which was "average to above average," although they got less straw from the stems of the wheat plant because of the dry weather. Sweet corn is being harvested now, with a "decent yield." They are seeing more short cobs with "drought tips", where the kernels are not developed. They are also having more problems with corn borers, which thrive in hot weather and are more tenacious without the rain to wash them off the plant.

"I am amazed we have a crop. We've had less than one inch of rain in two



HARVEST TIME: Area farmers are in the midst of harvest. Corn is ready and soybeans are next. This summer's hot dry weather caused lower yields in many cases. *Rebecca Ring Photo*

months," says Tony's wife Joanne, "There's been a lot more work sorting. We separate the short cobs and any with worms. We do sell them as seconds at a reduced price."

As far as the grain corn goes, Van Tol says that anything can happen. If it rains enough, then the corn growing now will produce a better yield. Its price is affected more globally, depending on its market.

If going to ethanol production, Canadian farmers are in tough competition with U.S. farmers, who have had a much higher yield, according to Van Tol.

"We're the small kids on the block, so when the U.S. farmers have a high yield, it keeps the price down on the global market." However, much of the local grain corn goes to local feed companies.

Van Tol says he feels for

the farmers with clay soil as it is most affected by drought. It becomes "like cement, so the plants can't grow deep roots." He also predicts that the price of hay will be higher this year as yield was lower. "The first cut was good, but then the second and third cuts are very small. The quality is great because there was no rain during baling, but the quantity is not so great," he says.

Van Tol remains optimistic, saying, "We're farmers. If this year doesn't work out, we always say next year will be better. It keeps us motivated." He is thankful for the rain last weekend. Sweet corn will continue to be available at their farm in West Garafraxa and at the corn stand on Main St. in Rockwood, managed by friends. It was planted in stages to ensure a continuous supply.

"The kids were out picking this morning," he says, "The drought set off the timing a bit so it is slower than normal, but we should have some more in Rockwood by the weekend."



SIGN OF TROUBLE: The mobile sign at Lion's Waterside Park in Rockwood has been vandalized twice within a week and a half. The destruction could result in its removal, leaving the Rockwood and District Lions Club with one less form of communication. *Rebecca Ring Photo*

Vandals on destructive spree in park, cafe

By Rebecca Ring

"They smashed our sign two weeks ago and tipped it over again last weekend," says Rockwood and District Lion Darryl Nichol. The vandalized sign is the large mobile one at the entrance to Lions Waterside Park on Main St. in Rockwood.

"We just got it fixed and put back into place when they did it again. The first time, they pushed it over sideways and it just missed the historical plaque. Then we staked it down and chained it. They got the stakes out but couldn't get the chain out so it could only tip sideways. There was less damage," says Nichol.

Lights were also smashed out in the pavilion.

The vandals continued their attack on the cafe across the street. "Our lamp post was damaged. They broke the shade. They also destroyed the bench out front, which belongs to the township," says Lynn Wass, who owns Eramosa River Cafe with Evelyn Russell.

These incidents were reported to the Wellington O.P.P., who are investigating. There are reports of a white SUV seen in the park Friday night, "loaded with kids making a lot of noise," says Wass.

Anyone with information is asked to contact the Wellington O.P.P. or Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-TIPS (8477), which guarantees anonymity.



Guelph man critically hurt in collision on Jones Base Line

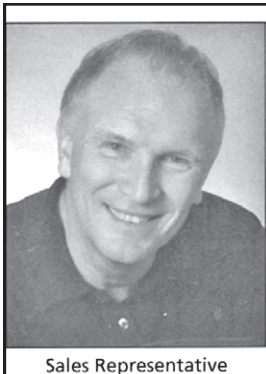
A 30-year old Guelph man, Craig Pitman, is listed in critical condition and his passenger, a 25-year-old Guelph woman, Erin Foley, was injured, but not critically, when the man's Ford Focus and a Toyota Tundra collided in the Jones Base Line about 6:25 p.m. last Friday, August 24. The driver of the Toyota pick-up a 40-year-old Guelph man, was not injured.

Wellington OPP said the collision occurred when the Toyota Tundra pick-up travelling south on Jones Base Line, pulled out to pass another vehicle on the crest of a hill about 1km south of High-

way 7 and collided head-on with the Focus, which was travelling north.

Firefighters from Guelph-Eramosa Fire Dept. extricated both occupants from the Ford Focus. The driver was airlifted to Hamilton General Hospital where he was listed in critical condition. Paramedics transported his passenger to Guelph General Hospital with non-life threatening injuries.

The driver of the Toyota, David Nemes, was arrested and faces a charge of driving with more than 80mgs, police said, after failing a roadside screening test.



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