

Rain washes out grain corn harvest

Wet crop to be left on fields until next year

About 130 corn farmers across the region are being affected by the wet weather which has created harvest conditions more severe than anything experienced for nearly two decades.

Wet field conditions and grain corn crops high in moisture and hard to harvest and preserve are responsible for the problem, said Acton farmer Frank Anthony, who is also president of the 25,000-member Ontario Corn Producers Association (OCPA).

"The cold summer growing season of 1992 has resulted in grain corn crops which are commonly in the range of 35 to 45 per cent moisture in most areas of Ontario," he said.

Impossible to dry it

"With moisture percentage of 35 per cent or above, it is virtually impossible with modern technology to harvest grain corn and dry it down to an acceptable level for storage of 14 to 16 per cent moisture, in a manner which will ensure the quality of product required by many corn users."

"For farmers attempting to do so, the costs are enormous because of the huge requirement for fuel for drying, and the low-quality discounts deducted by buyers — and these charges must be deducted from grain prices which are already at or near historic lows because of the record size of the corn crop now being harvested in the United States."

The charges and deductions can exceed one-third of the gross value of the crop, said Mr. Anthony.

Soggy soil

Harvest problems are being compounded by wet, soggy soil conditions caused by excessive rainfall in recent days.

The corn association president notes that while similar harvest difficulties prevail for much of southern and eastern Ontario, the crop is in somewhat better condition in extreme south-western parts of the province.

"We expect that the supply of corn from south-western counties should be adequate to meet the needs of high-quality corn buyers in the coming months," said Mr. Anthony.

Farmers' difficulties are increased by the fact that official moisture testers are only calibrated up to a

level of 35 per cent moisture for corn.

Growers delivering corn above 35 per cent moisture to commercial elevators may send a sample to the Canadian Grain Commission office in Chatham for a more accurate moisture measurement.

Commercial elevators have information on procedures for sending samples.

There is no charge from the Commission office for the service. Producers and commercial elevators usually share the sample shipping costs.

The corn association recognizes that leaving corn in the field to dry to 30 per cent moisture or below — so that it can be dried at a lower cost and with less damage to quality during the drying process — will mean that corn will remain in many Ontario fields when winter begins in a few weeks.

Although snow could knock over some of the crop the harvest loss would be outweighed by the advantage of dryer corn, according to the ministry.

Crop insurance officials recognize that many farmers will have no choice but to harvest their crops later than normal. The Ontario Crop

Insurance Commission has assured the OCPA that unfavourable harvest conditions this fall will not jeopardize a grower's eligibility to receive benefits under the program.

No pressure

"If it is determined that it is not feasible to harvest corn this fall, the Commission will not pressure farmers to do so," said Henry Ediger, general manager of the Commission.

The date of harvest has no bearing on a producer's eligibility under the Market Revenue Program.

"Corn producers are asked to exercise patience at this time to allow the crop to dry down to more normal moisture levels, in order to more accurately assess the quality of the crop," said Bill Jongejan, chairman of the Ontario Crop Insurance Commission.

Grain corn is grown on approximately 15,000 acres in Halton and 1.7 million acres in Ontario, and has a total annual farm gate value of about \$550 million.

Most of the crop is used for industrial processing and for the feeding of livestock in eastern Canada, although a sizeable quantity is usually exported most years.

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