

News Column

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JUNE CORN

I was pleased, to say the least, when our June 15 planted corn yielded 138 bushels per acre in 2017. I'm sure somebody topped that yield in Riley County that year, but that's a really good yield for our tough upland gumbo soil.

In 2018 the corn at our place was planted June 9 and yielded 106 bushels per acre. I should have been satisfied because fields within five miles of our farm, that were planted in April, were being chopped for silage because of expected grain yields from 20 to 40 bushels per acre. But, I admit it. I was disappointed.

I knew my 130 bushel per acre prediction for our 2018 crop was far too optimistic about a month before harvest. That's when I walked the far side of the field to get the electric fence in shape for later in the season and realized it wasn't all as good as it looked from the road. Therefore, I reluctantly told myself to expect something less than 130, if we ever got the field harvested.

Note that I said, "if we ever got the field harvested." If you plant June corn, expect a late harvest. It won't dry down until late fall,....and may never get down to the 15.5% moisture level the elevators want. Fall harvest weather added to the problem in 2018. Our corn was harvested December 18 and neither the field nor the grain was dry.

In 2017 there was a reason for the late planting date. A big rain right after planting resulted in a poor stand that our tenant wasn't willing to accept. I told him there was enough stand out there to still yield 80 to 90 bushels per acre, but he chose to re-plant (and got 138

bushels per acre instead).

In 2018, I think he was just feeling good about the previous year and wanted to try it again. Whatever the reason, I'm confident June planting worked in our favor again.

Now, it is looking like 2019 might give a lot of other folks a reason to try June planted corn. Statewide, crop reporters were indicating that only 70 percent of the corn in Kansas had been planted as of May 26. Some of those acres may still get planted to corn, and some will be switched to soybeans or grain sorghum.

While crop insurance certainly doesn't favor later planting – decreasing coverage by 1% per day for every day corn is planted after May 25 in Riley County – K-State research suggests yield may depend more on the environment than on planting date. I doubt that surprises anyone, but it may be worth noting that sometimes the later planting date produces the higher yield.

In a high stress environment – where planting time conditions were favorable, but then it turned hot and dry for the rest of the summer – the insurance folks are correct. Yields will decline about 1 percent per day of planting delay in years when it stays hot and dry all summer.

In what the researchers referred to as a low stress environment – where rainfall was favorable during the entire growing season – yields were reduced by less than 20 percent when planting was delayed to mid-June.

The final category noted during the years the research was conducted was what they called an early stress environment. In the early stress years, corn growth was limited by cool temperatures and wet conditions early in the growing season, then growing conditions were favorable for the remainder of the season. In early stress years, corn yield actually increased when corn planting was delayed until late June.

Thus far, this looks like an early stress year. I have no clue what to expect from here on

out, but I'm not afraid of mid-June planted corn. If you want more information, you should probably talk to my tenant because he is far smarter than me....but you can call me if you want.

If you have questions, you can reach me at the Riley County Extension Office at 785/537-6350. Or, you can send e-mail to gmclure@ksu.edu.

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