

Late Harvest Tips

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Although this week's snow didn't stick around long, many growers are concerned that their crops may have been damaged during the winter-like weather.

While the snow was not exactly welcome in the area, the extent of damage that it caused is dependent on the crop in the field and its condition prior to our latest storms. While corn is able to withstand winter weather better than soybeans, fields at risk of stalk lodging or ear drop should be prioritized. Soybeans should be harvested as soon as the ground and grain temperature allows, as they have a tendency to swell and break open the pod during wet periods, leading to yield loss.

When the ground does dry up enough for harvest to resume, harvesting frozen grain can lead to combine and equipment issues. Take care to adjust combine settings to prevent losses through the machine. Soybeans that were killed or damaged by frost likely have smaller seed size, so reducing cleaning fan speeds will help avoid blowing soybeans out of the combine. Airflow should also be reduced to compensate for the smaller sieve openings that small soybeans will require. Harvesting wet or frozen grain can also lead to evaporative cooling inside the machine, causing pods or other husk materials to stick to the grain, creating cleaning problems. This phenomenon occurs most often at air temperatures between 27 and 35 degrees. Walk the field after a combine pass and make sure that grain is not being left on the ground, too. Four soybeans or two kernels of corn per square foot equates to one lost bushel per acre.

While we wait to get back in the field, take this opportunity to scout fields one last time. Corn fields with less stalk strength or that are dropping ears should be harvested first. Tall soybeans are most at risk for lodging, so should be prioritized as well. Also look for wet spots or areas that may not be able to be harvested this year. While going around spots does take time and cost money, it is usually faster and cheaper than getting a piece of equipment stuck. Finally, think about areas that are likely to suffer wildlife damage and take into consideration the potential yield loss in these areas.

(Written 11/1/19)