Field Notes: June 24, 2009

Late spring, early summer for growers.

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Most of this year's crop has improved greatly during the last month; however the weather has shown its continued ability to dominate field crop agriculture by changing abruptly from wet to dry. And along with the shift in precipitation has come summer heat with temperatures more like mid July than June. Our planting season was in many ways a month late; and now the summer heat has arrived a month early. It's like we skipped a month somehow. I hope we find it again this fall in added time to finish and harvest the crop.

Those who ascribe to the theory of global warming will probably blame this weather on that misguided idea; but we've seen strange weather patterns before. These things occur at wide intervals, often with enough time between them to fade from memory; but we or possibly our grandfathers have experienced all of this before. These things have been endured before; and will be again.

Our corn crop is maturing just as it was planted, in two fairly distinct groups of plantings. The oldest plantings are now in full tassel, pollinating and filling ears; while those fields planted later following heavy rains will begin exerting tassels and silks within the next week or two. The more advanced fields are now very dependent upon plentiful moisture for metabolic processes and grain filling. Younger corn also requires good soil moisture; but may be capable of dealing with drought better since they have not yet entered the reproductive phase. These fields are dependant upon our receiving July rains to support high yields.

A question being considered is that of applying fungicides to corn. This practice has expanded among growers even though our trials have not shown consistent economic benefit. Some feel that stalk strength is improved, or possibly that grain quality is better; but somehow we have not been able to document higher yield which is the best justification for any production practice. Fields should be scouted for the presence of disease, especially those known to be capable of reducing yields, and the decision based on these findings.

Soybeans in Maturity Group 4 that were planted prior to mid April have reached the reproductive R3 and R4 stages when we recommend the application of yield-enhancement fungicides. At these stages, young pods can be seen; but seed are not yet beginning to develop within them. When seed begin to form, plants will have reached the R5 stage. The application of fungicides to soybeans can be expected to increase yields; and when numbers justify it an insecticide can be included to protect the crop from damage.

Cotton is growing well, and dealing with heat and moisture stress better than either corn or soybeans. It still fits our climate best, as we all know it does. Some fields have been treated for plant bugs; and will soon be ready for an application of growth regulator. Fruit retention is very important since most fields had a late start. We need to set this crop, mature it, and get it to the gin.

It's hard to accept that many of you received twenty or more inches of rain in May and none so far in June; but that is our present situation. Crops are living on stored soil moisture; and depending upon crop, variety, soil conditions, and several other factors, will continue for a "while' longer. Those who can irrigate should do so; the rest of us must be patient. Thanks for your time.