



The Chem Gro Crop Watch, Issue #3, 5/17/11

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Sometimes good beginnings = bad endings (“Voodoo Days”). The entire month of April could have been considered April Fools’ Day in Hancock County. The beginning of the month started out dry and unseasonably warm with many 70 to 80 degree days in the afternoons as we entered the April 5th -9th timeframe. The soil was “working like a garden”, as the words ran off the lips of many ambitious and excited farmers who dreadfully remembered the horrible planting conditions just one year earlier. A few began planting, while the majority held off to the following week of April 11th – 14th to put corn in the ground. The weather forecast was calling for slight chances of rain for that week, and as the rainy day predictions approached; the larger threats of rain were being pushed farther back into the forecast. This left a fairly safe planting window to plant corn, as I have seen way worse forecasts in years prior. The night of April 14 and the day of April 15th brought a light shower and cooler weather. The extended forecast for the following 7 days was horrible in my opinion for planting corn, but a few ventured out on April 17th and 18th. Ground conditions were not ideal, as I have come up with another word to describe less than ideal soil conditions: FRESH (see description below). Below is a list of descriptive ground conditions that have been conjured up by my farmer friends over the years:

1. ***Ground is too wet*** = there is water still running down through the draws and you will probably get stuck.
2. ***Ground is heavy*** = means you can get across the fields, however, you really ought to have at a minimum a front wheel assist tractor, but the ground works up “chucky”.
3. ***Ground works like a garden*** = the most ideal ground conditions to work ground and plant; ground is mellow, dry, and crumbles in your hand.
4. ****NEW for 2011...Ground is fresh*** = means ground is not wet or heavy; it works like a garden in tith but it does contain too much moisture. It really needs a good 6 hours of drying prior to planting because there barely is any dust behind the planter but we are going to plant it anyways because there is rain coming latter today and we really just want to finish this field(s) to be done.

With the poor extended weather forecast and poor ground conditions for the April 17th and 18th planting dates, I fully expected those two days to be Voodoo Days. However, I did not think the time period of April 11th – 14th was going to be included in this Voodoo Days stigma. The majority of the corn planted during this time period was put in ideal ground conditions (dust flying behind the planter, and no heavy rains within 48 hours after planting). I fully expected this corn was going to be fine, but I was wrong. So what happened?

1. **Tillage operation did not seem to matter**. I saw fields finished with a field cultivator, vertical tillage tools, and even fall applied strips planted with RTK on the strips that all failed to produce uniform stands.
2. **Diseased radicals**. The first root to emerge from a germinating kernel of corn is the radical. On the lighter organic matter soils which are typically cooler in the spring, I noticed many plants that were struggling to emerge and had less vigor compared to some of the neighboring

plants. After digging them up, I noticed that the radicals were diseased off, and the plant was under stress. Although many of these plants would have survived, they are what I consider a “runt pig”. They still gain weight and grow at a slower pace, but they will never catch up and be 100% compared to a larger and healthy plant with no diseased roots.

3. The ground stayed too cold and too wet for too long! The germination process was very successful; however the last ¼ to ½ inch of emergence became extremely challenging. This corn remained in the soil for a full 21-28 days in which the soil temperatures went backwards, instead of gaining. The top ½ inch of soil became extremely hard, and most corn plants that emerged came from deep cracks in the soil. Many final stands only averaged 23-26,000 plants per acre. These were more than adequate for June 1st final stands, but not for May 9th final stands. Decisions were made to tear up the less than ideal stands in hopes for gaining more yield potential with higher populations.



What should I do different for next year to prevent this from happening again? In my opinion, I would have given the April 11th – 14th planting dates a 90% + chance of success for achieving optimum final stands. Ground conditions were ideal, soil temperatures were warm enough, and the extended weather forecast was not a huge threat. Sometimes that 10% chance of negative can still bite us in the butt. So, should you do anything different for next year? I would say no, and hope that luck is on our side next year. April 17th – 18th Voodoo Days.... the writing was on the wall. That’s all I am going to say about that.

Black cutworm larva have hatched and are feeding on seedling corn plants. We have finally acquired enough heat units, as evident by the scattered dead corn plant carcasses lying on the ground as if a tiny chainsaw has ripped through them. The excessive amounts of winter annual weeds have provided an ideal habitat for black cutworm moths to lay their eggs into. If you have not applied a preventative application of insecticide for black cutworm, now would be a good time to start monitoring your emerged fields for cutworm feeding. The old threshold for spraying for black cutworm is 3% cut plants, but with \$6.00 new crop corn I would unleash revenge at 1-2% cut plants.



That’s my 2 cents worth.....the choice and decision is always yours.

Lonne



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