

# Farmers report: 'Midwest granary won't be near full'

*The following is a selection of first-hand reports on the agriculture and infrastructure damage from five farmers, as of the first week in August.*

## Iowa

The second week in August is forecast to bring big rainstorms. From a motor trip I made to the west of here a couple hundred miles, I saw ponds all around. The fields looked spotty. Crops were drowned from rain. The corn is 8 inches to shoulder-high, when it should be head-high. It is at least three weeks behind. Only a few fields were tasseled. The corn was yellow. The beans were still 4 inches tall. Grain elevators near rivers were flooded. It is really bad in my area.

You need warmer weather. It's been too cold and wet. In 10 of the past 11 years that were wet, there always turned out to be an early frost in a wet year.

In just the northeast corner of the state, and westward across Iowa, I estimate that there are 2 million acres of crops ruined. For the whole state, the damage may end up to be 30-40%.

They are selling oats with 16-pound test weight; it should be running 18-25 pounds. At least one-third of the farmers are making oats straight into bales; it is not worth combining. Dampness and rust got into the oats. No quality.

—Vernon Bohr, Cresco, Iowa

## South Dakota

In the corn and soy area of southeastern South Dakota, which is the main area for the row crops, the corn is three weeks to a month behind normal. We have a normal frost date of the last week in September here. We need a mid-October date. The fields are very uneven, with low spots, which means there will be a variation of quality at harvest. Some will be ripe and some will have moisture, which means storage problems.

The National Corn Growers Association held a press conference. . . . They said the corn is extremely vulnerable to an early frost date. They are concerned about the frost date. Their crop estimate based on interviews with 600 farmers is 7.5 billion bushels, but there has been deterioration since late July when the estimate was made.

The Mitchell area has received the largest increase in rainfall of any area in the state. It has not been affected by the runoff, but the soils are totally saturated. Fifty percent of the county farmland wasn't farmed this past year because of

the rains. The eastern third of South Dakota, if we don't have an extra-late fall — a very late frost — we will be in trouble.

A lot of the corn isn't near tasseling; some is starting to tassel. Last night we had record-breaking low temperatures. The rain has slacked off, and we've had some advances in harvesting in the winter wheat area. Some of the area is still underwater. Many of the combines had tracks put on them, or else rear-wheel assist so they can get through the mudholes, which is an added expense. One farmer said it will cost \$8 an acre.

The soil erosion is unreal. In this area and east of here we used to have a rotation of 50% corn and 50% small grains. Now we have eliminated that process and have gone to a rotation of soybeans and corn. We have continual use of herbicide year after year, keeping the fields totally nil of weeds; and this wet season, as a result of the corn-soy rotation, the erosion impact on the land is unreal. The topsoil has run off. It will take generations to replace that topsoil.

The other thing is the compaction with all the water standing on the land, all the machines running through the mud. Many of the fields are tracked up; with the tracks of the machinery going over them, that process of refurbishing the land and getting the oxygen-bearing bacteria back in the soil will probably take a period of three to five years. We're going to see the effects on the soil three to five years from now.

I think there will be major problems for next spring's production in the low-lying areas. I think, for the spring, we can forget about a lot of the production on the river-bottom land — the better lands in the state.

Thirty-four counties in South Dakota have been declared disaster areas; all of that is in eastern South Dakota. The estimate of road damage is going close to \$1 billion.

Because the railyards have been flooded, the grain has not been moving. The elevators were full of grain. They bought at rail prices, and didn't want to ship it out by truck, so they couldn't take any more grain. It would cost another 30¢ a bushel to send it out by truck. There's a huge demand for railcars; they have to go to the Gulf to dump, when usually they only have to go halfway.

In the western part of the state, the wheat harvest is done, and I didn't see any on the ground. The reports are of 30-50 bushels per acre. There are low spots in the field where grain did not fill out.

All the oats are on the light side. The quality and test weight are way down. The discount will be heavy. I will bail

my crop for hay, because of the discount.

I drove to Menno for parts — about 90 miles southeast — and I drove all the way before I saw *any* corn or soybeans which looked they way they were supposed to.

—Ron Wieczorek, Mt. Vernon, South Dakota

## Illinois

*Western Illinois:* In my area, near the Mississippi River, when the Sny Levee broke, 44,000 acres were flooded. The break at West Quincy, Missouri flooded 14,000 acres of beans and corn. Indian Grave Levee District broke and flooded 30,000. South River Levee in Missouri broke and flooded 10,000.

Where the Illinois and Mississippi Rivers came together in Winchester, farmland was also flooded. Grafton farther south doesn't have a levee, and the town was flooded. There was no levee in LaGrange, Missouri.

Our levees were older and were never made to stand this kind of water. The Quincy water plant and soybean elevator has an industrial levee, which had a much bigger base and was much taller than the agricultural levees, and it didn't flood.

The Army Corps was on television . . . and said, "We build the levees, but the districts don't maintain them." It's up to the districts to maintain the levees. There is a different standard for agriculture levees.

To the east of the flood and rain belt in Illinois, the corn is looking good. Champaign and Bloomington are the main corn areas of the state, and corn is looking good there. It is not behind.

—Mary Jo Holtschlag, Liberty, Illinois

*West central Illinois:* We're 40 miles south of Rock Island. We got some heavy rains, but were not flooded. Our crop looks excellent. In this general vicinity, from what I understand from people who have traveled in Iowa and Minnesota, they say this is as good as you'll see. But we're still two-three weeks behind normal, as far as maturity. The crop in my area looks good. I have heard no discussions about likely damage.

The first official estimate will be Aug. 11. Two weekends ago, we got 8-15 inches of rain; it came so fast, it ran off. There was some flooding on a small scale, but no damage of any consequence. Much of the corn crop was not in the flooded area. Mainly the area paralleled the Mississippi River, which is not a large portion of the crop.

Farther north in Illinois may have suffered because of delayed planting and wet weather, from reports that I get. They say it's considerably behind, the farther north that you go. That's not good, because it lays it open to frost damage, and the weather is cool and wet now, which prolongs maturity. It wouldn't be good if we got even a normal frost. We are vulnerable here if it were to come early enough.

One private estimate came out today, a little higher than

the grain trade. On the soybeans it was 1.918 billion bushels, and on corn it was 7.625 billion bushels. That was from Sparks. The Farm Bureau has estimated 7.5 billion bushels on corn. Sparks and Conrad Leslie are the two forecasters people put confidence in. In the past few years, those are the main estimators.

Ohio, Indiana, and the biggest portion of Illinois are in good shape. Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska are not in good shape. We won't know until harvest, and then we may not get the truth.

—Roger Wenstom, Wataga, Illinois

## Minnesota

It is a nebulous thing to try and pin down what the crop is going to be like at harvest time, but I think that a ballpark estimate could be 50% lost, and it might be worse than that, depending on when the frost occurs. In previous years, the frost has occurred all the way from Sept. 1 till the end of October, so I think for us to get that 50% of a crop, we'd have to have a frost hold off until the end of October. Things are so far behind on maturity that the corn is just now starting to tassel — one month behind. The repercussions will be severe as far as the average independent entrepreneur — be he a farmer or small businessman, the agricultural machine dealers, and so forth.

Approximately the southern third, or 25%, of Minnesota and especially the south central and southwestern parts of the state, are the worst damaged. It ranges from completely drowned-out black areas of fields, to fields of just stunted growth. It ranges from corn that is probably going to tassel at waist-high or something like that, and never make an ear, to other areas that are slightly better drained, where the crop will be better, but not what it should be.

The corn and soybeans also are in an anaerobic situation, in that you need oxygen in the soil to metabolize and to get the soil function to work. But the soil was so full of water that there was not a lot of activity going on. There was a lot of yellowing of the corn and stunting of the corn. We really never had a chance to get our crop in in decent shape and get it in on time. It was one blast of drenching rain after another, and the soil is just saturated.

Only now are the rivers starting to go down below flood stage. It took a while for the rivers to move from our area down into the central part of the country, and when they did, they really showed up in a big way. So I don't think the world can depend on southwest Minnesota as being the granary for the world this year.

It's a combination of factors that has led up to this. The problem isn't just wet weather. The problem is low commodity prices which are below parity, and a farmer isn't able to cover his costs and generate a reasonable profit and capitalize equipment. So the disaster is a concern for the farmer, and it's a concern for the country.

—Andrew Olson, Heron Lake, Minnesota