

# Checking the Back Forty



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## What a Difference a Year Makes: Comparing May 2010 to May 2011

The NASS (National Agricultural Statistics Service) weekly weather reports provide good information on the amount of heat we have during the growing season and also the amount of rainfall. It is not as good as keeping track of your own on your farm but still represents the season very well. For one thing they calculate Growing Degree Days (GDD) which is helpful when trying to keep track of maturity for corn and soybeans which has a base temperature of 50°F. The data here is for April 1 on. Corn isn't planted that early but looking at the GDD and rainfall to date lets look at similar dates between 2010 (Table 1) and 2011 (Table 2).

Two very different growing seasons; 2010 was average to below average rainfall but above normal temperatures. 2011 has more normal temperatures but above average rainfall, way above!

**Table 1. Weather Data for Week Ending Sunday, May 16, 2010**

Station	Temperature (°F)				Growing Degree Days Base 50° <sup>1/</sup>			Precipitation (Inches) <sup>1/</sup>			
	High	Low	Avg	Departure from normal	Week	Season	Departure from normal	Week	Departure from normal	Season	Departure from normal
Cobleskill	78	28	46	-9	15	172	+85	0.74	-0.06	3.61	-1.47
Morrisville	78	29	46	-9	14	171	+90	0.83	-0.01	5.47	+0.55
Norwich	80	26	46	-9	20	163	+72	0.96	+0.12	4.96	-0.30
Oneonta	76	29	47	-7	16	179	+102	0.92	-0.06	5.19	-0.48

**Table 2. Weather Data for Week Ending Sunday, May 15, 2011**

Station	Temperature (°F)				Growing Degree Days Base 50° <sup>1/</sup>			Precipitation (Inches) <sup>1/</sup>			
	High	Low	Avg	Departure from normal	Week	Season	Departure from normal	Week	Departure from normal	Season	Departure from normal
Cobleskill	74	38	56	+3	41	121	+40	0.18	-0.61	6.98	+2.02
Morrisville	75	40	57	+5	52	114	+39	0.01	-0.82	8.67	+3.87
Norwich	81	35	57	+3	48	126	+41	0.00	-0.84	9.67	+4.53
Oneonta	78	36	56	+4	42	125	+53	0.12	-0.86	9.69	+4.16

From the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service New York Field Office  
 and the New York Department of Agriculture and Markets

<sup>1/</sup> Season accumulations are for April 1<sup>st</sup> to date. Weekly accumulations are through 7:00 AM Sunday Morning

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## Thoughts on Changing Hybrid Maturity Given a Later Planting Date

Dr. William J. Cox, Department of Crop and Soil Science, Cornell University

*Editors Note: This is an email Bill sent out to extension educators on Monday, May 16. K.H.G.*

I have received quite a few phone calls this morning (May 16) on keeping or staying with corn hybrid relative maturity (RM) groups, given the forecast for the remainder of the week. So I will venture out and make some comments. Two things to keep in mind:

If hybrids are planted later than normal, they require less growing degree days (GDD) to finish up or mature. For example, a 105 day RM hybrid planted on June 1 instead of May 1 would require only 2100-2150 GDD to be ready for silage harvest instead of the typical 2200 GDD when planted on time.

If growers got started last week, they planted their early or better-drained ground so now they will have to wait for their later or poorer-drained ground to be ready before they can plant.

Digging out some old data, I found a 3-year study (1988-1990) that we did at Aurora and Mt. Pleasant with planting dates on about April 25, May 10, and May 25. At Aurora, our 105-110 day hybrids yielded 23.9 tons/acre compared with 22.8 for the 101-105, and 19.5 for the 95-100 day hybrids when planted on April 24. For the May 8<sup>th</sup> planting date, the yields were 23, 22.4, and 20 tons/acre, respectively. For the May 22 planting date, the yields were 22.7, 22.3, and 19.7 tons/acre, respectively. At Mt. Pleasant, our 95-100 day hybrids yielded 15 tons/acre compared with 15.1 tons/acre for the 90-95 day hybrids, and 13.2 for the 85-90 day hybrids when planted on April 26<sup>th</sup>. For our May 10<sup>th</sup> planting date, the yields were 15.6, 15.6 and 13.9 tons/acre, respectively. For our May 24<sup>th</sup> planting date, the yields were 15, 15.4, and 13.7 tons/acre, respectively. So for regions where there is no real threat of an early fall frost (first frost is in October), the data indicate not to back off on maturity length just yet.

So if it was me and I have selected well-adapted silage hybrids that are typically ready by September 20-25, I would stick with what I have for silage up until May 29<sup>th</sup> or so. If I have some real late material (112 day hybrid when all my other hybrids are less than 105 days) that I took a chance on, I would return it immediately. By Saturday of this week if the forecast is not good for planting next week (May 23-29), I would start scaling back my hybrids by 5 days. In general, a hybrid that is 5 days shorter in RM will be 1.5 points drier but will yield about 0.75 tons/acre less (<http://css.cals.cornell.edu/cals/css/extension/cropping-up/archive/upload/WCU18-5.pdf>). And I would keep scaling it back by 5 days as each week passes. I would do the same thing for high-moisture shelled corn.

For dry shelled corn, I would probably stay with the hybrids that I have selected up until May 25<sup>th</sup> or so as long as they typically black-layer by September 20-25<sup>th</sup> when planted during the first half of May. We found that 95-100 and 101-105 day hybrids planted around May 20<sup>th</sup> yielded as well (or even better due to weather factors) than planted around April 25<sup>th</sup> (<http://css.cals.cornell.edu/cals/css/extension/cropping-up/archive/upload/WCUVol21No1.pdf>). The hybrids planted on May 20<sup>th</sup>, however, were about 2.5 points wetter at harvest, which would translate into a \$12/acre increase in drying costs for a 150 bushel/acre crop (or growers could wait another 7-10 days or so to get the moisture down further). The other option that cash grain growers have is to switch to soybeans once June rolls around and corn planting is not finished. There is less of a yield penalty for planting soybeans late than for planting corn late. We found that there is only about a 1/3 to 1/6 bu/acre/day decrease when soybean planting is delayed from May 15<sup>th</sup> until about June 15<sup>th</sup> (<http://css.cals.cornell.edu/cals/css/extension/upload/WCUVol17No2Mar-Apr2007.pdf>). Furthermore, late-planted soybeans on corn ground would have no extra drying costs to worry about because wheat was not slated to be planted in that field.

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## **Alternative Forages**

With the wet soils questions always come up on alternative forages that might be planted instead of having bare ground. At this date these are options that one might keep in mind but it is still to early to give up on corn.

Sorghum-Sudangrass(SxS): BMR (brown mid rib) SxS will be of considerably higher quality than conventional SxS. Needs to be cut 30-36" tall for best combination of yield and quality. Getting two cuttings in can be a challenge at higher elevations. Needs plenty of nitrogen from manure and/or N fertilizer. Windrows can be hard to dry especially the second. Expect 3-4 tons of dry matter from 2 cuttings. Although people have concerns over prussic acid it is rarely a problem. Don't green chop or graze shorter than 24 inches or immediately after a frost. After a frost allow to dry for several weeks before grazing or allow several weeks after harvest to ensile before feeding. Reference: <http://nmsp.cals.cornell.edu/publications/factsheets/factsheet14.pdf>

Teff: A warm season annual grass that can provide cover and forage. Plant after June 1 at a seeding rate of 4-5 lbs per acre. A down side of teff is that it is a small seed and needs a fine seed bed to establish well. Should be ready to harvest in 50-55 days in a late vegetative stage and second cut after 40-45 days. Harvest as hay crop or graze but don't harvest first cutting lower than 4 inches to insure good regrowth. Should get 2 tons of dry matter if you get two cuttings. Reference: <http://nmsp.cals.cornell.edu/publications/factsheets/factsheet24.pdf>

Soybeans: Soybeans make excellent forage when harvested just before they begin to turn yellow at maturity. High quality although be aware of higher fat content than typical legume forage because of the beans. Plant just as you would soybeans for grain. Although forage types are available experience here has found those to be lower in quality (more fodder, less bean) so go for the same varieties you would for grain. The forage varieties were developed for the hotter drier conditions in the south and where the excess growth is welcome to get any yield. Expect 2-3 ton of dry matter.

Two things to keep in mind. First make sure any of these crops fit you harvest, storage and feeding system. Do you have a good system to store and feed out these crops? Second keep in touch with your local NRCS office so that you stay in compliance with your conservation plan.

## **Mid-Summer Seedings?**

Many seedings did not get planted this spring and may not get done this spring. If you are considering planting what has always been called a fall seeding I would encourage you start planning the date now. The idea of a fall seeding is really a misnomer; too often the seeding is put off until the middle of August or later and that is simply too late. The title really should be a mid-summer seeding.

I would start planning seedings for the middle of July with the planting date to happen the last week of July or by Aug 1 at the latest. There has always been the thought that Aug 15 is the cutoff date. The point is it is just that; about the last date you can plant and hope to have any success. The problem is that if the seeding doesn't get planned to be done until the beginning of August and it barely gets in by Aug 15. If you want to improve your success think July 15 with getting any seedings done by Aug 1. If you want the best chance for success allow time for those seedings to get established by winter.