Rain and wet conditions have greatly slowed the harvest of the remaining corn and soybean fields in the area. Fortunately, most of the fields were harvested before the weather changed.

It is estimated that 98 percent of the soybean fields have been harvested and 85 percent of the cornfields.

The remaining soybean fields were planted late because of wet May conditions, or were planted after the wheat harvest in late June or early July.

For corn, remaining fields were late plantings or replants after the second May conditions prevented planting or damaged stands planted in April or early May.

This year is a good example that raising crops has many similarities to the baseball season. There can be slumps and winning streaks during the season, but champion teams hang in there until the final game... or as the saying goes, it ain't over 'til it's over.

As usual, weather has been the challenge, but many fields have finished strong with good yields. Let's review some of the challenges that farmers faced this year.

Farmers had a lot of optimism at the beginning of the season. The warm and dry late April allowed them to get an early start with corn planting. They knew that research has shown earlier-planted crops generally have larger yields.

However, heavy rains at the end of April followed by cooler temperatures crust the soil surface, forming a seal over the tender crop that was trying to emerge. Farmers tried to break this seal by using rotary hoes.

In many situations, even with the rotary hoe, surviving plant populations were too low for optimal yields. Farmers tried to replant these fields, but the weather would not cooperate in the month of May. The limited number of dry days for field operations delayed corn replanting and some first plantings to the end of May.

Most soybean fields were planted at the end of May and the first part of June because of the cool and wet May. In June, some rains in the county were several inches at a time, causing localized flooding in the fields.

Then the big rain hit in the first part of July.

First it was the flash flood that damaged the fields near drainage ditches and streams, but these same fields were damaged even more by the main flood that followed as all of these water bodies dumped into local creeks and the Blanchard River.

Unfortunately, smaller rains continued off and on for the next few weeks after the flood and fields remained saturated with water. The saturated soils affected soybeans the most, causing leaves to yellow and stunting of plants.

After the floods, dry weather set in for the next three to four weeks. Fortunately, most of the corn had pollinated before the dry conditions and plants that survived the flooding had good kernel set and development.

Once the soils dried out, soybean plants produced new growth and flowers into the early part of August. Individual soybean plants also compensated for low populations by producing more branches that in turn produced more flowers.

Timely rains in August generally determine the upper yield limits in soybeans. Fortunately, rains fell in time for many parts of the area to satisfy the needs of developing pods and seeds.

It is expected that the Hancock County average soybean yield will be larger than the 48.4 bushels per acre recorded in 2016. The U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates this year's Ohio average yield to be 51 bushels and I expect Hancock County yields will be similar.

Many soybean fields in the county averaged over 60 bushels per acre. Low-yielding fields either did not receive adequate August rainfall or were unable to recover from flooding in June or July.

Average corn yields should be much larger than 2016's 143.2 bushels. The average corn yield for Ohio is estimated to be 173 bushels. I expect Hancock County's average yield to be around this number.

However, most cornfields were not average. Either a farmer had excellent yields or low yields. Low yields were often a result of fields unable to recover from flooding or stand damage from earlier wet conditions. Fields yet to be harvested may likely be lower-yielding cornfields as a result.

Farmers in the area need high-yielding crops since grain prices continue to be low. The U.S. is expecting another year of large production for corn and soybeans. Soybeans may set a new U.S. record. As a result, grain prices may continue to move downward, a trend that began in 2014.

Farmers were thankful that this year's corn and soybean yields, for the most part, have been good. Things looked pretty bleak for crops back in early summer, but the weather changed for the better in late summer and early fall, allowing them to finish the season with better than expected yields.

If you get a chance, thank a farmer for raising the food that will be shared this Thursday. Wishing you and your family a happy Thanksgiving.

Lenz is extension educator for agriculture and natural resources for The Ohio State University Extension Service in Hancock County. He can be reached at 419-422-3851 or via email at lentz.38@osu.edu.

Lenz can be heard with Vann Wickerham on weekdays at 6:35 a.m. on WFIN, at 5:43 a.m. on WKXA-FM, and at 5:28 a.m. at 106.3 The Fox.