Farmers are watching their crops closely as we approach the end of the growing season. August is a critical month for grain fill, and excessive dry weather at this time can greatly diminish yields.

Following is a general discussion of the crops up to this point.

For most farmers, the corn crop looks good. Planting conditions were good for even emergence and early stand establishment. Most of the fields were planted in May because of a record cold April.

However, abnormally warm temperatures in May got corn off to a good start.

Rains affected the planting and early growth of corn in some areas. In these areas, heavy or frequent rains prevented planting until the end of May, while other areas were more on the dry side and needing a rain for early growth. Thus, the area has early or late corn depending on spring rains.

The early corn pollinated shortly after the Fourth of July. The later corn fit the saying “knee high by the Fourth of July.” Even though there were many hot days in July, pollination was not a problem for the early or late corn because soil moisture was adequate and there was relatively high humidity during the day and night.

Warmer temperatures have accelerated the growth of corn so that even the late-planted fields should have enough days to mature before the first killing frost. It generally takes 65 days for corn to mature after pollination.

Leaf diseases have not been a problem since most farmers have selected hybrids with good disease tolerance, particularly against gray leaf spot and northern corn leaf blight.

Insects have also not been a problem.

For the rest of the growing season, weather will determine the final yield, particularly grain fill (size of the kernels).

At this time a farmer can do little to improve corn yields except hope for good weather conditions — timely rains and moderate temperatures.

Most soybean fields are in good condition. Most fields experienced good emergence and stand establishment as a result of warmer than normal temperatures in May and June.

Like corn, there are early and late-planted soybean fields because of heavy rains in some parts of Hancock County. Some of these areas had stand losses from localized flooding along streams and ditches. However, soybean plants that survived adjusted with more branches and yield losses may be minimal.

Disease and insects have not been a problem in soybean fields up to this point. Most disease problems occur when a farmer has not selected varieties with good disease resistance, such as frogeye leaf spot, white mold, sudden death syndrome, and cyst nematodes.

Bean leaf beetles and stink bugs may cause problems near harvest time by feeding on pods and seeds. Pod damage allows fungi to invade pods and seeds, lowering grain quality and potential yield.

Waterhemp populations have become large enough in a few fields that yields will be reduced from competition. Farmers with these fields will have to be careful at harvest time to prevent the spread of seed from these fields and change their herbicide program in 2019 to reduce its impact.

Weather will determine soybean yield from now until harvest. June and July weather conditions generally do not affect final soybean yield. As long as there is an adequate stand of beans, final yield will be heavily influenced by timely rains from the end of July into the first part of August.

These rains will allow soybean plants to produce more flowers and set more pods in August. In most years, farmers can see a 10-bushel increase in fields that receive timely and adequate rainfall in August.

Even though we still have to wait to see corn and soybean yields, wheat was harvested in early July. For the third year in a row, wheat yields have been above average. Many fields were in the upper 70 bushels per acre, but it was not unheard of for some fields to yield over 100 bushels.

Disease was a factor for this year’s wheat crop. Conditions were not right for fusarium head scab to infect fields at flowering. Foliar diseases, such as stagonospora glume blotch, rust and septoria were also not a problem during grain fill.

Hot temperatures in June may have reduced wheat yields as much as 10 bushels in many fields. Wheat grows best when afternoon temperatures are in the 70s. Temperatures over 90 will cause the plants to mature and die sooner, reducing the time that plants can move carbohydrates and protein into the grain.

However, weather conditions were excellent for wheat harvest, reducing problems from sprouting and mold development in the grain.

In addition, mycotoxins were not an issue because head scab was not a problem.

Thus, grain quality was good except for test weights, which were probably lower from the shortened grain fill period.

In general, crops are doing very well. Future weather will determine whether we have excellent or average yields. The area could benefit from a significant rain this week.

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