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What's the Right Corn Planting Date?

Officially the right planting date is when soil temperatures at a 4-inch soil depth are at 50°F and rising. So what date is that? Typically, 50°F soil temperatures are consistently reached around April 20. Planting from April 20 to May 5 optimizes yields. However, just because soil temperatures and calendar dates have aligned does not mean corn should be planted. Planting conditions are critical. Wait for a suitable seedbed to avoid sidewall compaction, re-opening of the furrow or conditions where soil crusting could occur. While most people want to forget the spring of 2008 we should remember those lessons for 2009 and beyond.

Emerson Nafziger sums it up well, "Delays in planting until past the end of April, though they cost some yield, do not automatically mean large yield losses. Planting even two or three weeks after the optimum date might well produce higher yields than planting into cool, wet compacted soils closer to, or before, the optimum date."

More details can be found at [ICM News](#) or from [Emerson Nafziger](#).

Deciding on Corn Populations

Corn planting populations are an ever moving target. Populations are, and have been, moving up for several years now. There is no perfect population target. Hybrid genetics keep that population target moving upward because of better genetics becoming available. However, some hybrids tolerate higher populations better than others.

Current ISU data recommends an optimal seeding rates in the 32 to 35,000 plant per acre range. This accounts for both grain yield and seed costs. Learn more at the [ISU Corn Production, Planting webpage](#).

Tips for Uniform Corn Emergence

1. Use a moderate planting speed; faster is not always better
2. Match seed grade to planter plates
3. Check finger pickups for wear on the back plate and/or brush
4. Check wear on double-disc openers and seed tubes
5. Make sure planter transmission settings are correct
6. Check for worn or stiff chains and tire pressures
7. Clean drop tubes and tube sensors
8. Align coulters and disc openers
9. Set air pressure to seed weight
10. Lubricate as recommended when using seed applied insecticides

Soil Temperatures Remain Sluggish

Soil temperatures remain sluggish considering temperatures are not very warm. Remember corn planting should be held off until soil temperatures are 50°F and rising. Right now soil temperatures in west central Iowa are between 42 and 44°F. Get daily updates on the [Iowa Mesonet](#) or check for yourself at a 4 inch soil depth.

ACRE Sign-Up Extended

The Farm Program sign-up dates have been reset to begin on April 27 and end August 14. Even with that it will likely be beneficial to wait until the beginning of August before actually signing the forms. Go ahead and fill out forms, but wait to sign. The reasoning behind this is; 1) by the August 14 deadline you will know within pennies what the 2008-09 average crop price will be, 2) the August 12th crop report will give insight into U.S. crop conditions, and 3) you will have an idea of the 2009-10 U.S. prices and the Iowa yield outlook.

Alfalfa Cold Injury Was a Possibility

Alfalfa fields that broke winter dormancy in late March were susceptible to cold injury a week ago. Temperatures in the low to mid 20's could have presented problems to existing and newly established forage stands. For established stands now is the time to dig some taproots to check for firm healthy tissue that is creamy white in color. Crown buds should be intact and firm.

Fields seeded in 2008 should have 12 crowns per square foot and more than 8 for fields seeded in 2007. Stems per square foot is a better judge of productivity on established stands. The target here is over 55 stems per square foot.

A more complete article can be found in the [ICM News](#) or on the [University of Wisconsin's forage webpage](#).

Do you Twitter, Elwynn Taylor does!

ISU Extension Climatologist, Elwynn Taylor, is now using Twitter. While Elwynn is no longer a daily feature on WOI, he does Twitter nearly every day. These are short (140 characters or less) updates on the internet that can be sent as text messages to your cell phone. Check it out at <http://www.twitter.com/elwynntaylor>.

Extension Entomology Changes

Dr. Marlin Rice has left Extension for greener pastures with industry. Dr. Erin Hodgson will be starting in May. Erin worked with Dr. David Ragsdale in Minnesota and helped develop a speed scouting method while there. Dr. Jon Tollefson will continue to fill the void and provide Extension expertise for corn insects.