

Extension Crop Update

This newsletter, and previous issues from recent years, can be found on-line at:
<http://www.extension.iastate.edu/plymouth/info/cropupdate.htm>

May 6, 2008

Volume 11, Issue #5



Prepared by

Joel DeJong,

Extension Field Agronomist

Plymouth County Extension
24 1st St. NW
LeMars, IA 51031
Phone: (712) 546-7835e-mail:
jldejong@iastate.edu

*Serving Cherokee,
Lyon, O'Brien,
Osceola, Plymouth,
Sioux and Woodbury
Counties in NW Iowa.*

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Corn Emergence is Slow! But you knew that. In a recent "ICM News" article, the Growing Degree Units since May 1 showed that we had averaged an accumulation of 82 GDUs (Base 50) through May 11 in NW Iowa. Corn takes approximately 125 GDU's to emerge. Higher residue situations might take a little longer, and wetter soils also warm slower. But, 125 gets you close in most cases. For those who planted corn in April, you can add these numbers to find out about where your corn is right now. The week of April 17 to 23 had a total of about 40 GDU's accumulate (42 in Sioux City, 38 in Sibley). April 24 through April 30 had an average of 30 GDU's accumulated (27 for Sibley, 33 for Sioux City). So, if I planted April 24, I would have had about 112 GDU's in Sibley through this past Sunday. That would put this corn very close to emergence today, and from my observation – some of these fields were getting a few shoots through the surface this morning.

In May, according to the data, we are about 25 GDU's behind normal. That is one good summer day that averages 75 degrees. However, it takes about 3 average spring days to make up the difference, since we are cooler this time of year. Yes we are behind, but we are still in good shape in most NW Iowa fields!

So what is a Growing Degree Day? Many of you know how to calculate that, so I won't go into detail here. But Rich Pope, now with the Corn/Soybean Initiative at ISU, wrote a good article about GDU's on May 1, 2006. Read about how this is calculated and why it is important here: <http://www.ipm.iastate.edu/ipm/icm/2006/5-1/degreedays.html>

Insect notes. *Black cutworm* catches have been sporadic and not overly heavy this spring, beginning in mid-April. Normally we have predictions as to when to start scouting for this pest by this time of May. Remember that insects are temperature driven in development – so they are growing slowly this spring, also. Therefore, the dates to start scouting haven't yet been calculated due to cold temperatures. Marlin Rice, ISU Extension Entomologist, will likely release these scouting date suggestions soon. I will then share with you. Historically we have used 2% of the corn plants cut (or 5% for bigger larvae sizes) as the threshold for treatment for this pest. You will likely see that threshold drop to 1% for this year due to the higher value of the corn crop. Keep watching, I will update again in the near future.

Alfalfa weevils are about due to begin feeding on alfalfa. These green larvae with dark heads feed on the newest tissue on the tops of plants, so look for leaf feeding or use a sweep net to see if they are present. If you find a few, then collect 30 stems, shake them in a white bucket, and see how many per stem are present. Some data from last year on treatment thresholds can be found at this ISU ICM Newsletter article: <http://www.ipm.iastate.edu/ipm/icm/2006/5-1/degreedays.html>.

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Alfalfa Management: Alfalfa is off to a slow start, but I thought this might be a good time to talk about cutting management. As this alfalfa gets bigger, growers and livestock raisers should closely watch their alfalfa fields to determine readiness for cutting. Cutting at the right stage is important to achieve the desired hay quality that will support growth, weight gain, or lactation. I encourage you to use the PEAQ method to help you determine the quality of your alfalfa for the first cutting. For information on PEAQ, visit this web site: <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/crops/peaqest1.htm>. It gives you step by step instructions for estimating the forage quality in the field – based on stage of growth and plant height.

Today I was in two Plymouth County alfalfa fields, and the tallest stem height was 13". The stems are in the vegetative stage. **The calculated PEAQ value for these sites would be about 250 today.**

It's important to remember variability occurs among neighboring fields and can show differences up to 30 RFV points. So it's important for producers to measure their own crop. Relative feed value drops an average of 3 – 5 points per day. Alfalfa should be around 150 RFV for milking dairy herds, 120 – 130 for heifers, stocker cattle and lactating beef cattle. Under the best conditions, 15% of the forage dry matter will be lost at harvest. Therefore it is necessary to cut at 165 – 170 RFV to end up with forage at 150 RFV.

As you can see it is still way too early to consider harvest. But, I will continue to check the height, and will report each of the next couple of weeks to give you an idea what the current hay feeding value is.