



Rainy Days, Soggy Soils, & Idle Planters

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While only about 20% of Indiana's corn crop is typically planted by 30 April (1983-2001 crop reporting data, Indiana Ag. Stats. Service), farmers have been spoiled the last couple of years with excellent weather and soil conditions in late March and early April. Consequently, many farmers throughout the state were already well into planting by this time last year. Not so in 2002. Rain and snow during the past four weeks have [delayed the start of corn and soybean planting](#) throughout Indiana.

None of this is news to the regulars down at the Chat 'n Chew Café, but the frustration level is beginning to build among those who are faced with a significant acreage of corn yet unplanted, let alone that of soybean. While there is plenty of time to begin corn planting within the prime planting window of late April and early May, the risk is mounting that the finish of corn planting may occur in mid-May or later when yield losses to delayed planting increase significantly due to the shortened available growing season and accompanying stress factors. What can growers do to minimize that risk?

By the time the end of April rolls around, growers should concentrate primarily on planting corn and less so on performing related field activities such as tillage and pre-plant fertilizer or herbicide applications. This advice is particularly applicable if the time spent accomplishing these other field activities would otherwise limit the completion of the planting operation in a

timely fashion. In particular,

- If you were aiming for pre-plant **nitrogen applications**, consider switching to a sidedress nitrogen application strategy using either 28% UAN liquid nitrogen or anhydrous ammonia fertilizer sources. An additional benefit to sidedress fertilizer strategies is that applying nitrogen fertilizer after corn emergence reduces the time frame for nitrogen loss caused by leaching or denitrification, resulting in more available nitrogen to the growing crop. The primary risk associated with a sidedress fertilizer strategy is that rainy June weather may prevent timely nitrogen applications before the crop becomes too tall for ground-driven application equipment. See Tony Vyn's related news release on [sidedress nitrogen](#).
- If you practice conventional **tillage**, reduce the number of pre-plant tillage trips. Today's planters do not require tabletop smooth seedbeds. If shallow tillage was performed last fall, consider planting into the stale seedbed without any additional tillage this spring. If no tillage was done after last season's soybean harvest, consider no-till planting the corn into the soybean stubble. See Tony Vyn's related article on [tillage in a wet spring](#).
- If you were aiming for pre-plant incorporated **herbicide applications**, consider switching to pre-emerge or post-emerge application strategies. The arsenal of corn herbicides suitable for pre-emerge or post-emerge applications is much larger than years ago. The primary risk associated with pre-emerge or post-emerge strategies is that rainy weather after planting may prevent timely herbicide applications before the weeds become too large for effective control or the crop develops beyond the herbicide label restrictions for crop growth stage.
- Minimize **herbicide application down time** and headaches by taking advantage of the current soggy soil down time to scout your fields and identify the major weeds (primarily winter annuals) that are already growing. If you will be applying burndown herbicides, make sure you have the products readily available that will most effectively control the weeds identified by your field scouting activity. Calibrate and perform last minute preventive maintenance on your spray equipment. Make sure you have enough and the right chemical products to accomplish the job to avoid those unexpected trips to the dealer during planting. See a related article by Glenn Nice and Tom Bauman on [burndown herbicides](#).
- Minimize the risk of **planter equipment down time** by using these days of rain and soggy soils to go over the planter and tractor one last time to ensure that everything is working properly. This includes any last minute calibrations of starter fertilizer and insecticide applicators. Also make sure you understand all the ins and outs of any electronic controls associated with the planter (seed monitors, variable seed drives,

fertilizer controls, GPS receivers, etc.) to minimize valuable time spent during planting trying to figure out why some @\$%! electronic component is not working properly.

- If you use some type of **air planter** AND your seed corn this year ranges from very small to large or very large kernel hybrids, make sure you are prepared for any necessary seed disc/drum switches and/or adjustments in air/vacuum pressure when you switch from one seed lot to another. Write the necessary information down in your pocket notepad or palm computer now so that you won't waste time thumbing through the operator's manual during planting or, worse yet, ignore the planter adjustments altogether.

Finally, if you are already wondering whether to switch to earlier maturity hybrids because of the late start of the planting season, the short answer is "Don't worry yet." A decision to switch **hybrid maturities** is not necessary for most Indiana corn growers until planting is delayed to late May or later.

Some Related Online References:

Fertilizing corn can wait, planting crop can't (Purdue Univ.)

http://www.agriculture.purdue.edu/aganswers/2002/4-23_Fertilizing_Corn.html

Tillage Options for Corn in a Wet Spring (Purdue Univ.)

http://www.kingcorn.org/news/articles.02/Tillage_Wet_Spring-0424.html

Burndown Madness (Purdue University)

http://www.entm.purdue.edu/Entomology/ext/targets/p&c/P&C2002/P&C2_2002.pdf

Postemergence broadleaf control in corn (Univ. of Missouri)

<http://ipm.missouri.edu/ipcm/archives/v12n6/index.htm>

Early season weed control in corn (Univ. of Missouri)

<http://ipm.missouri.edu/ipcm/archives/v12n5/index.htm>

Dealing With Dandelions (Ohio State Univ.)

<http://corn.osu.edu/archive/2002/apr/02-08.html>

Burndown Considerations for 2002 (Univ. of Illinois)

<http://www.ag.uiuc.edu/cespubs/pest/articles/v200202.html>

New Herbicide Labels (Ohio State Univ.)

<http://corn.osu.edu/archive/2002/apr/02-07.html>

Effectiveness of burndown herbicides for winter annual and perennial weed control in corn and soybeans (Michigan State Univ.)

http://www.msue.msu.edu/ipm/CAT01_field/FC04-26-01.htm

Equipment maintenance: Planters (Iowa State Univ.)

<http://www.ent.iastate.edu/ipm/icm/2002/4-8-2002/>

Sprayer Calibration Pays Dividends (Ohio State Univ.)

<http://www.ag.ohio-state.edu/~corn/archive/2001/apr/01-10.html>



For other information about corn, take a look at the Corn Growers Guidebook on the World Wide Web at

<http://www.kingcorn.org>

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