



Press Clipping Article

Title: Cold spell could cause problems for corn, wheat crops

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Freezing temperatures over the next several nights could do more than kill flowering plants. The cold weather could hamper the region's corn crop -- and could possibly kill much of the wheat crop.

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Freezing temperatures over the next several nights could do more than kill flowering plants. The cold weather could hamper the region's corn crop -- and could possibly kill much of the wheat crop.

"You've got several potential problems staring you in the face," said Greg Comer, Ohio County's extension agent for agriculture. "The corn above the ground, subject to how tall it is, is (at risk) of being frozen off.

"I can't remember the last time we had three or four days of hard freeze" during corn planting, Comer said.

Clint Hardy, Daviess County's extension agent for agriculture and natural resources, said recent cold, wet weather has delayed planting over the past week. If temperatures fall as low as predicted, "we're going to see some freezing injury on this corn," Hardy said.

"In Daviess and McLean counties, there has been a minimal amount of corn planted, but what has been planted has emerged," Hardy said. "If we get down as cold as they say, 24-25 degrees, there could even be some damage" to corn below the ground, he said.

If the soil temperature drops enough, it will slow corn germination, Comer said. In turn, slower germination will increase the chance of corn seed contracting diseases or being damaged by insects, he said.

"The ideal situation is we get (seed) in the ground and get (the plant above) the ground quickly so we minimize the disease and insect damage," Comer said.

Corn plants above ground killed by frost should regenerate, Comer said.

But the area wheat crop could be severely affected by the expected freeze.

"Our wheat crop is at a very susceptible stage," Comer said. "If we have those freezes three or four nights in a row, we could have damage."

Unlike the young corn crop, wheat could be killed by hard frosts. If that happens, farmers could cut the damaged wheat for hay, or could simply burn off the crop and plant corn, Comer said.

Some damaged wheat, however, might be unusable even as hay. Comer said farmers who cut damaged wheat for hay should have the crop tested for nitrogen levels. If the crop has been sprayed with nitrogen fertilizer, nitrate levels in damaged wheat may be too high for animal consumption.

"You could poison cattle with high nitrate levels," Comer said.

While damage to the wheat crop is not a foregone conclusion, "I think the potential is probably pretty good we're going to have damage," Comer said.

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