

# Downed Corn May Force Some Producers To Harvest Early

LEXINGTON, KY.

Farmers across the state are dealing with corn down in the fields as a result of Hurricane Ike's remnants that hit Kentucky last weekend. To prevent any further yield loss, now may be the time for these farmers to begin the harvest, said Sam McNeill, extension agricultural engineer in the University of Kentucky



College of Agriculture.

Even though Ike did not bring much rain to the state, its high winds caused a significant amount of crop damage. Under normal weather conditions, Iowa State University reports average annual harvest losses of about 6 percent. No official loss totals are in yet from last weekend's storm, but some extension agents in western Kentucky are predicting losses to be above average.

"In some cases, the damage looks worse than it really is, but in other instances, the damage is just as bad as it looks," said Chad Lee, UK grains crop specialist.

Crops were hit the hardest in the Green River and Purchase areas of the state. In some fields, the entire crop is down. Hurricane strength winds of 75 mph were reported in Louisville, and gusts reached 50 mph in Lexington and Paducah, said Keys Arnold, UK staff meteorologist. While these are strong gusts, crop damage was

exacerbated by weak cornstalks.

"Corn on the ground is the worst case scenario for any producer, and weak corn stalks only aggravate the problem," McNeill said.

The majority of the state's crop had matured enough to harvest before the storm hit, but producers left it in the field to dry naturally because with high fuel costs, it is more cost effective than drying in a bin.

Harvesting now will likely incur some drying costs, but those will likely outweigh the cost of further yield loss and crop damage.

"Liquefied petroleum is currently at \$2.25 a gallon; so that cost translates into 4 cents per bushel for every point of moisture removed," McNeill said.

This means if corn is at 25 percent moisture and needs to dry down to 15 percent, it will cost the producer a total of 40 cents per bushel, he added. Nationwide, average yield estimates are predicted to be at 150 bushels per acre. Therefore, the estimated total cost to dry an acre of corn down 10 points will be about \$60. With corn at \$5 per bushel, the drying costs amount to 12 bushels per acre, or roughly 8 percent of an average yield-

ing crop.

With the downed corn, producers should be prepared for a much slower harvest. Combine speeds should be around 3 mph. Combine operator's manuals are the best guides for adjustments to harvesting downed corn. Most of the losses will come from the head of the combine. Adjust stripper plates and snapping bars to prevent ears from falling through. Consider using corn reels to help feed down stocks into the header. Producers with severely damaged stalks or uprooted plants may want to consider using a soybean head to cut off the stalks and reduce corn plugging the machine's head. Those with fields containing varying amounts of damage should make adjustments whenever crop conditions change.

Above all, the most important thing to remember is not to be in too big of a rush and to have a safe harvest, McNeill said. Δ