

Early Planted Corn Has Numerous Benefits

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Research clearly shows that, in most years, corn responds favorably to early planting. Studies in southern Illinois have indicated that early April plantings have the potential to achieve the highest yields. Unfortunately, wet soils often delay planting. The 2008 and 2009 seasons have demonstrated that late planted corn can still yield well if the growing season is favorable.

Early planting has a number of benefits. It enables the plant to produce more vegetative growth during the long days of summer. The plant can also finish pollination before the expected hot, dry conditions typical to late July and early August. Early corn may also produce better root growth. Corn planted early has an improved chance for greater natural field dry-down. Plus, farmers may be able to plant wheat in a more timely manner following early planted corn.

There are also risks to early planting that should not be overlooked or minimized. "Early"

often means cold, wet soils that are more stressful. Pest problems have a better opportunity to attack early plantings. Wet soils, early or late, can lead to compaction that could limit yields and remove the early advantage. Very early plantings may be subject to frost damage. Season-long weed control is also more difficult with an early planting.

I do realize that to a large extent this is an academic exercise. Most farmers begin planting corn when the opportunity presents itself. Yes, corn will only germinate and begin growth at temperatures of 50 degrees or greater. The condition of the soil is one of the most important factors. Soils should be friable and work well. "Mudding in corn" or creating compaction is rarely justified.

It will be late summer before we conclusively know the best planting period in 2010. What do we know in April? It is now time to use your best planting judgment, management and effort. Finally, the one item that pays off each and every season is safety. Remember to farm safely so that you can continue to farm timely.

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