

Wet Fields, Challenging Harvest

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Late planting created late maturity of crops in 2009. Everyone was hoping for good harvest conditions, and about everyone was disappointed.

October is usually the driest month of the year. This was not the case in 2009. Some areas recorded record rainfall. Almost all of southern Illinois was saturated. October monthly rainfall amounts included: Fairfield, 7.5 inches; Olney, 8.1 inches; Ina, 8.5 inches; Dixon Springs, 9.9 inches; Carbondale, 10.2 inches; and Belleville, 11.3 inches.

Effectively, this means that a large part of harvest has been conducted on wet fields. Farmers know that they have to continue harvest under any condition that will physically allow them to get the crop out of the field. The result is a substantial number of fields with combine and grain cart tire tracks/ruts.

Field rutting is necessary in these extreme conditions to harvest the crop before excessive deterioration and field loss. However necessary, field rutting is still quite detrimental. Ruts create rough uneven areas that often retain water.

Crop residue may be spread unevenly. There will be variability in fields. Extremely wet areas with deep ruts are problematic. Slightly drier areas that had a lot of traffic may have severe compaction.

Just as creating the ruts was necessary, repairing the ruts before the next crop is necessary. Level, non-highly-erodible land can be repaired/tilled with some difficulty, but without much complication. Highly erodible land (HEL) will often have special requirements.

Try to wait until fields are dry enough to work before attempting to repair. Till only deep enough to even out and fill in ruts. Consider seeding repaired areas with a temporary cover crop if time and conditions permit. Compacted areas may require deeper tillage when soil is dry enough to shatter or break apart.

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service is the appropriate authority on soil erodibility and the implementation of farm conservation plans. If you wish to till and repair a highly erodible field, contact your county NRCS/Soil and Water Conservation District. NRCS will examine your crop and tillage history. Appropriate practices and recommendations can then be discussed. Δ

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