



Rademacher Farms Newsletter

Newsletter 3 - Corn Planting

June 2020

We were finally able to plant corn in Mid-May! It's up and looking pretty good, but wasn't without its challenges. But first, an answer to a question we received after our last newsletter:

"So cover crops really help reduce flooding??"

Yes! It helps by 1) reducing raindrop speed and 2) maintaining channels made by roots, worms, ants, etc. There's a practice called "rain gardens" that are encouraged in cities. Rain gardens are planted along streets and in yards and are designed for infiltrating water to keep from overloading storm drains. Different plant mixes and soil types have different water infiltration rates. Prairie mixes in high organic matter soils have very high infiltration rates, sometimes 4"+ per hour! Agricultural fields often get ponds after 1-2" rains, which is hardly natural. "Rain gardens" are basically what we're doing, but on a massive scale.

Corn Planting

We have two corn fields this year, both planted into last year's wheat. There's less residue on these fields than we'd like because of the drought last year. The lack of cover contributed to more weeds than we anticipated, but that wasn't an issue since we were able to control them with herbicide. This was our first time planting with the "roller-crimper" on the planter, and we loved it. It's designed to lay residue flat in a mat that saves moisture and suppresses weed germination. It worked excellent and we're excited to see the results, especially in soybeans, but more on that in the next newsletter.

Here's a little summary of what's going on this year:

- 1) We're trying new varieties and varieties that will mature faster. This gives us more time to get cover crops planted and growing as we continue to use them to eliminate herbicide and fertilizers.
- 2) Untreated corn - Almost all seed planted has fungicides and insecticides on it. This is the second year trialing untreated corn. As we build our fields into an ecosystem, the less "-cides" we should need need.
- 3) Various fertilizer trials - trying to figure out how much we need and when/how we need it.

How's everything look??

Well. It's been better. The reason we didn't plant in April was because it was forecasted to get cold and wet. Unfortunately the weather changed after we planted and that's exactly what happened in the May planting window as well. Following 3-5" of cold rain, we had about 4 out of 120 acres drown, but otherwise things look pretty good...provided the birds stop eating all our corn!

We're not the only ones with some ugly fields. No matter which direction you go, the vast majority of fields are struggling. It's not hard to find uneven plants, spotty areas, and completely bare spots. All things considered, I think we ended up lucky compared to many. It's another unfortunate year for many producers. The picture below shows a local field that is facing the same issues as nearly every other field this year. While not easy to see in this picture, this field had at least 20 bare spots scattered throughout the field. This really complicates pest control, fertilization, and harvest as some areas will be over 1 month behind spots right next to it.



Our corn fields have been planted and sprayed twice. The cold and wet weather rendered our first herbicide pass at planting useless, so we weren't able to skip a herbicide pass like we had hoped. Corn is about 12" tall now and in a couple weeks it'll get a little more fertilizer. The forecast is looking pretty dry for a while and we're glad to have some residue on the surface to cool the soil surface and retain water. Fingers crossed that we don't have another dry spell like last year!

Wheat/Rye Status

Wheat is looking great despite the heavy rains, a cold spring, and late freezes. We've probably lost the top yield potential, but it's still holding up well. We went ahead and sprayed fungicide since the weather during pollination was rainy and humid. That fungicide application will prevent a disease that produces toxins in the grain. At this point, the wheat is finished pollinating and is developing kernels. It's great to have full sunshine next week so that the plant has a lot of energy to produce grain. Up next is harvest in Early July!

The rye we were growing to harvest and sell as cover crop seed didn't fare as well with the late hard freezes in April and Early May. Those freezes 1) sterilized many grain heads and 2) weakened the stems. As a result, the +5' tall rye was falling down in large patches, especially low areas, which are often hit harder by freezes. It was a disappointing finish, but not a disaster, as we were able to plant soybeans directly into the failed crop. It was a fun, very... educational... experience that we may try again someday.

Our soybean planting window was a whirlwind of five consecutive 14-16 hour days trying to beat the rain, but we did it! Soybeans are just popping up and fields are looking great. Next newsletter will be next week!

Frank