Illinois Extension
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Illinois Fruit and Vegetable News

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Editors: Nathan Johanning & Bronwyn Aly

A newsletter to provide timely, research-based information that commercial fruit & vegetable growers can apply to benefit their farming operations.

Address any questions or comments regarding this newsletter to the individual authors listed after each article or to its editors, Nathan Johanning, 618-939-3434, njohann@illinois.edu or Bronwyn Aly 618-695-2441, baly@illinois.edu. The ***Illinois Fruit and Vegetable News*** is available on the web at: https://extension.illinois.edu/specialty-crops/ifvn. To receive or be removed from email notification of new postings of this newsletter, contact Nathan Johanning or Bronwyn Aly at the phone numbers or email addresses above.

In this issue…

Upcoming Programs

See the **University of Illinois Extension Local Food Systems and Small Farms Team's website** at:
https://extension.illinois.edu/lfssf

- **High Tunnel Production** | Join Dr. Kacie Athey and Bronwyn Aly as they discuss various high tunnel vegetable production topics on Thursday, July 13, 2023 from 6-8 pm at the Dixon Springs Ag Center. To register online, go to go.illinois.edu/hightunnelproduction or contact Bronwyn Aly baly@illinois.edu or 618-695-2441 for more information.
- **Southern Illinois Summer Twilight Series** | 3rd Monday Evening in May-August across southern Illinois. To register for any or all of these meetings, go to go.illinois.edu/2023twilightseries or contact Bronwyn Aly baly@illinois.edu or 618-695-2441 for more information.

    - **Higginson Farm Market** in July 17, Elizabethtown, IL farm market sourcing from local producers/vendors
    - **The Patch** in August 21, Marion, IL cover cropped pumpkin patch & fall agritourism
- **Legal Training for Illinois Small Farms Webinar Series** | This is a quarterly webinar series for Illinois small farmers including new, beginning, and urban farmers brought to you by Illinois Extension's Local Food Systems and Small Farms team and presented by Farm Commons. Sessions will be held quarterly on Mondays from 7 – 8 pm CST, via Zoom. Pleas register at the links below for each session of the series:
    - Exploring H2A, June 26, 2023
    - 5 Steps to Protect Your Farm, September 18, 2023
    - Land Leasing Basics December 18, 2023
    - Forming an LLC, March 18, 2024
- **From Food To Flowers: Everything Local** | Save the date! January 17-19, 2024 Crowne Plaza, Springfield, IL. Look for more details in future issues.

News & Announcements

From Food To Flowers: Everything Local Call For Speakers

Help be a part of the largest food, farmers market, and specialty crop conference in Illinois. Share your knowledge, lessons learned, or research with industry leaders and growers across the state. We want you to consider being a SPEAKER at the From Food to Flowers: Everything Local Conference hosted by the Illinois Specialty Growers Association, Illinois Farm Bureau, and Illinois Farmers Market Association on January 17-19 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Springfield, Illinois.

This unique event gathers specialty crop farmers, niche and value-added producers, agritourism businesses, farmers market managers, distributors, buyers, and other members of the Illinois agribusiness sector to partner in further developing the robust Illinois local food supply chain.

The conference planning committee is seeking 50-minute educational sessions, research presentations, panel discussions, grower presentations, lessons-learned and more in the following topic areas:

- Tree Fruit Production
- Vegetable Production
- Flower and Herb Production
- Pumpkin Production
- Bramble Production
- Beekeeping
- Composting
- Agritourism
- Urban Agriculture
- Farmers Market Management
- Community Food Systems
- Food & Farm Policy and Regulation
- Business Development
- Farmers Market Marketing
- Food Safety
- Liability & Risk Management
- Market Promotion & Outreach

We want to hear from all of you. If you have an idea or topic you would like to discuss at this upcoming conference, please consider completing the From Food to Flowers: Everything Local Speaker Application. We ask that you fill this application for each individual presentation topic you would like to submit. The form can be found HERE.

As a speaker you will receive FREE admission to the conference and conference video library. Speakers are also eligible for travel reimbursement & one night of lodging. From multi-person speaking sessions lodging and travel reimbursement are not guaranteed. Please note an application does not guarantee the application will be accepted. You will be contacted by the conference planning committee for further review and confirmation.

Legal Training for Illinois Small Farms Webinar Series

This is a quarterly webinar series for Illinois small farmers including new, beginning, and urban farmers brought to you by Illinois Extension's Local Food Systems and Small Farms team and presented by Farm Commons.

Date and Time: Sessions will be held quarterly on Mondays from 7 – 8 pm CST, via Zoom.
Here are the links to live individual registration pages for each session of the series:

- Exploring H2A, June 26, 2023
- 5 Steps to Protect Your Farm, September 18, 2023

- Land Leasing Basics December 18, 2023
- Forming an LLC, March 18, 2024

Session Descriptions

June 26, 2023: Exploring H2A presented by Chloe Forkner Johnson, Staff Attorney, Farm Commons. The H-2A visa program makes it possible for farmers to bring in citizens of other countries for agricultural work in the United States. With a tight labor market, the visa program is experiencing a lot of growth – farmers who have never considered it before are taking a closer look. This program will help farmers assess whether H-2A might help address their labor shortage issues. We'll also go over the extensive regulatory obligations that come with participation in this program. With human trafficking also on the rise, we'll address key ways producers can guard against worker vulnerability in this program.

Sept 18, 2023: 5 Steps to Protect Your Farm, Legally Speaking presented by Eva Moss Education Program Director, Farm Commons. Are there a few, key steps that provide a big impact when it comes to the farm or ranch's protection from legal risks? We're so glad you asked! Yes, there are and every farm or ranch no matter its size, location, or longevity is in a great position to build resilience. Join Farm Commons for a webinar that will build knowledge and confidence around essential farm law issues.

Dec 18, 2023: **Land Leasing Basics** presented by Chloe Forkner Johnson, Staff Attorney, Farm Commons. Leasing farmland is so commonplace that landowners, farmers, and ranchers may not think twice about the lease itself… until things go wrong. Prevent problems with a strong lease while building a path to a resilient future. This online workshop will help you understand what a lease should include and how to put it in writing. Get started with the tools, knowledge, and skills you need to create a strong document that works for your needs, whether you are a landowner, rancher, or farmer.

March 18, 2024: Forming an LLC presented by Rachel Armstrong, Executive Director Farm Commons. If you or your producers are curious about the details of an LLC, you're not alone! Most farmers choose the LLC as their preferred business structure. The good news is that forming one is quite simple. But at the same time, farmers and ranchers need to know a few keys to ensure they get the benefits they're expecting from this entity. We'll do a quick recap of why an LLC is a good risk management tool before going into how to form one, which best practices to implement after it's formed, and regular obligations to keep the LLC in top legal shape. Even farmers who have had an LLC for years will learn some things about how to preserve their resilience.

Local Food Purchasing Assistance Program

Illinois has $28M to support local farmers and fight hunger in Illinois through USDA's Local Food Purchasing Assistance (LFPA) program. LFPA aims to strengthen the Illinois food system over the next two years by purchasing food at fair market value from socially disadvantaged growers and producers. The best part? Community members in need will receive the food at no cost. Illinois is committed to sourcing 100% of LFPA products from socially disadvantaged growers and producers and ensuring culturally responsive, locally-grown foods are accessible to food-insecure communities.

Let's create a collaborative network of food system support. Together, we can make a difference! Get involved at: https://extension.illinois.edu/food/local-food-purchasing-assistance

Asking For Help Just Got Easier With No-Cost Mental Health Access For Agricultural Community

URBANA, Ill. — Farming is stressful, and the Illinois agriculture community faces unique challenges every day that take a toll on mental health. A new program from University of Illinois Extension gives farmers and their families access to professional mental health care for free.

The Illinois Agricultural Mental Health Voucher Program broadens access to care by connecting producers with local mental health professionals. Agricultural producers, workers, and their family members can request vouchers that can be redeemed for three behavioral health sessions, either in person or online.

Research shows agriculture workers have higher rates of depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and deaths by suicide compared to the general population. Josie Rudolphi, Agriculture & Biological Engineering assistant professor and Illinois Extension specialist, says Illinois farmers also face many barriers to getting mental health care such as cost, insurance coverage, and access.

“Many people are unsure whether their insurance covers mental health care, as well as availability; many are not sure where or how to find a therapist,” Rudolphi says. “The voucher program works to reduce some of the barriers that preclude agricultural producers, workers, and their family members from accessing help.”

Kacie Hulshof, Illinois Agricultural Mental Health Voucher program coordinator, says the program is unique because it has established a network of participating Illinois mental health providers.

“Producers who may otherwise not have access can seek help free of charge from established, certified professionals without the need for medical insurance,” Hulshof says.

The voucher request form and more information can be found at go.illinois.edu/FarmStressVoucher. Independent providers and agencies who are interested in enrolling can email farm-stress@illinois.edu to see if they are eligible.

This program was made possible by a grant from the Illinois Department of Agriculture through the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Through the grant, Illinois Extension offers several programs to help people who work in agriculture to learn more about stress and stress management, as well as programs for agricultural community members and mental health providers to learn more about mental health and how to help someone who is struggling or in crisis. Learn more at publish.illinois.edu/FarmStress.

For more information, contact Kacie Hulshof at khulshof@illinois.edu or (217) 333-6205.

Regional Reports

From central Illinois…
Our production and demonstration garden at the Unity Community Center in Normal, IL received a nice infrastructure upgrade recently – a small high tunnel. Besides adding the capacity to grow protected culture crops over the cooler months for our free food donation program to in-need community members, it is allowing me to participate in my first year of ginger root production research; that effort kicked off this June. But why grow ginger, some may ask?

Illinois protected culture growers look to tomato and cucumber to be their main cash crops in the summer. However, a two-year crop rotation in tunnels can lead to buildup of disease pressure that can cause problematic outbreaks of fungal and bacterial disease. Adding a high value per square foot crop like fresh ginger into the rotation could help keep Illinois farms profitable while helping prevent crop disease outbreak.

Chris Enroth and Ken Johnson – Horticulture Educators in the Western half of our state – have been growing different varieties of fresh ginger in collaboration with Dr. Shelby Henning of Western Illinois University for the past two years. Preliminary results indicate that a) fresh ginger root could be a successful and profitable high-tunnel crop for Illinois high tunnel growers and b) that there is ready-made market demand for this product.

Now, ginger root as a high value Illinois specialty high tunnel crop is being evaluated in 3 locations this year – Macomb, Jacksonville, and Normal, IL, to better understand best practices of seed sourcing, germination, planting, crop fertility and development, harvest, and marketing. On June 14th, after rather intricate ground preparation involving trench-digging, backfilling with compost, and fertilizer, we planted our ginger rhizomes – which took 45-60 days to germinate(!). Our intent is to develop a draft Illinois Ginger Growers Guide in the next few years for eventual publication. Until then – stay tuned.

Planted ginger rhizomes. Photo by N. Frillman. 2023

As an aside: Central Illinois has been rather cool and dry for the last month. Daytime high temperatures haven't exceeded 85 degrees except for maybe 12 of the last 30, and in the same month, Bloomington-Normal has had 1.5-2 inches of rain, give or take. I note slower than expected growth of pepper and tomato crops nearby. Hopefully it warms up – and if it does, those with good drip irrigation/fertigation systems in place will likely have an average to better than average production year.

Nick Frillman (309-663-8306; frillma2@illinois.edu)

From the St. Louis Metro East… Much of the St Louis Metro East received varying levels of rain on Father's Day, with reports of rainfall from 0.2" to 2.5". Many watched the doppler radar excitedly as rain appeared to be coming right at them, only to see the storm dissipate or skirt around them before finally getting any real rain, resulting in highly variable rain amounts from otherwise close locations. The region is still on the dry side and more rain is needed.

Frost Ring on 'Gala' Apple. Photo courtesy of S. Miller.

The asparagus and strawberry harvests are completed. Overall, the asparagus crop was reported as average to good and the strawberry crop was reported as average to excellent. Cool spring conditions were good for an extended strawberry harvest window this year, but water was a limiting factor for those not irrigated.

In harvest now are black raspberries and early season peaches like 'Desiree.' Also in harvest from the field are various greens, green tomatoes, and zucchini. To clarify, some markets have a strong demand for mature green tomatoes over fully ripened tomatoes. Probably within the next week or week and a half sweet corn and early-season blackberries like 'Natchez,' 'Sweet-Ark™ Ponka,' and Sweet Ark™Caddo will be in harvest. The apple crop looks good overall. Some frost ringing is visible on select cultivars after the region experienced a freeze event on April 23, which was a 1-in-10-year event for that late of a freeze to have occurred.

Elizabeth Wahle (618-344-4230; wahle@illinois.edu)

From southwestern Illinois (Waterloo)… It is still very dry overall across our area. We have had a few scattered rain chances that have brought most at least some rain, however, we are at such an overall deficit, that it just doesn't feel that it goes very far. Last weekend was the most "widespread" rainfall we have had, but still some areas got as little as 0.2" but many had 0.6" to 1" with a few getting more than that in isolated areas. The saving grace across the board has been our mild temperatures. We have mainly been in the 80s for highs although we have had a few days into the 90s. Humidity has also been fairly low compared to normal. Low humidity is great for us but does take more water from crops, but the lower temperatures alleviate some of that stress on the crops. There are rain chances this weekend but so far scattered and no guarantees. For now, we will take whatever we can get and at least appreciate the pleasant temperatures.

In reflecting with a few local growers, this dry pattern locally started a year ago. Since the wet conditions of May of 2022, we really have not had any massively wet periods to replenish soil moisture. We had enough rain to make a good crop in 2022 but ended the season with a very dry fall and never

were very wet at all for any amount of time over the winter. That spilled into spring and where we are today. Many of our crops have lived "rain to rain" during this time with struggles at different points of the season.

In the field, we are in the midst of small fruit harvest with blueberries, blackberries, and raspberries all ripening. At home, we just finished up harvesting the last of the 'Duke' blueberries and now continuing on 'Earliblue' and the midseason varieties like 'Bluegold' and 'Bluecrop.' Yields have been very good with a very heavy bloom and fruit set. Please be mindful of spotted wing drosophila in all small fruits. As I mentioned last month, I have observed them heavily in cherries (untreated) which is earlier than I have observed them anytime in the past. While our peach crop is limited from the winter, there are some early peaches out on the market, in limited quantities.

'Duke' Blueberries ready for harvest. Photo: N. Johanning

Our vegetable crops are doing well, but for many irrigation has been key to success. That does not go with out challenges, as our wildlife is feeling the effects of the drought and also appreciates those black water fountains we lay out for them. Many growers have noted lots of patching from voles and other critters chewing holes in drip tape. Early sweet corn is starting to tassel with some hope that early plantings might make that July 4th goal for fresh sweet corn. I have heard of first harvest of green beans, cucumbers, early field tomatoes, and garlic among the ending of some spring cool season crops.

We are in the middle of the pumpkin planting season. Many growers have gone to drip irrigation just to get moisture to germinate direct-seeded pumpkins. At home, I transplant pumpkins as a double crop after wheat harvest. Transplants are seeded and will be ready in about a week which should coincide with wheat harvest. Wheat does not take up any moisture late in the season in the weeks when it dries down for harvest, and it also shades the soil reducing evaporation. I am hopeful that will preserve any moisture we do have so the transplants have some moisture to get them established. Remember for pumpkins or any crops, weeds are especially your enemy! You do not need any added plants growing, taking up water that the crop needs so stay on top of weed management. (Refer to the May IFVN for some pumpkin weed management details)

The bottom line is we at least some modest rain, especially over the next month, to help keep things growing and get late crops established. Time will tell!

Nathan Johanning (618-939-3434; njohann@illinois.edu)

From Dixon Springs Ag Center… We were thankful for the small shot of rain we received over the weekend (0.5" total across two days). Some locally isolated areas received 1.5-2.0" while others barely saw 0.1", but overall our region is still very dry, like the rest of the state. Daytime temperatures have

been staying in the mid to upper 80s with maybe 3 or 4 days in the last month that were over 90 degrees coupled with cooler nighttime temperatures have made for relatively pleasant working conditions for the month of June in far southern Illinois.

Within the hydroponic production tunnel at DSAC, we continue to harvest our three, day neutral strawberry varieties but finally had to make an insecticide application to keep spider mite populations under control. We elected to wait a bit before starting cucumbers and also to split the total number of plants into two planting dates, the first during the second week of May and the second will be around the first week of July. Other demonstration plantings within the hydroponic tunnel include multiple varieties of bell peppers, cherry tomatoes, and herbs along with small specialty melons, green beans and lettuce.

We began harvesting tomatoes from our research plots within the biological insect control project last week (June 12). For this project, collection of yield data will focus more on identifying and quantifying the amount of fruit that has been damaged from insect pressure compared with overall marketable fruit. With this first round of harvest, we have seen several worm damaged fruits from that early flight of armyworms last month. Weekly Bt sprays are continuing as tomato hornworms are now being seen during scouting. We noticed a bit of zippering, which is commonly seen due to pollination issues early in the season. The continued cool nighttime temperatures may prolong this physiological disorder longer into the harvest season. Some cracking has been noted and can be attributed to grower error, variety and fluctuating temperatures. We will begin to harvest bell peppers this week as well.

Ripe tomatoes harvested from research plots at DSAC. Photo by B. Aly. 2023

Bronwyn Aly (618-695-2441; baly@illinois.edu)

Fruit & Vegetable Production & Pest Management

Drought Takes Hold in Illinois

Mild dryness in April and early May has quickly transitioned to a problem following a very dry end to May and first few weeks of June. Most of the state has had less than 50% of normal rainfall since mid-May, and parts of central and northern Illinois are operating with 50-60% of normal rainfall since March 1st (Figure 1), with 90-day deficits approaching 9 inches in parts of western Illinois. The period April 1st to June 20th is the driest on record in Lisle in DuPage County (just 3.5 inches), the 4th driest on record in Champaign-Urbana (4.52 inches), and the 7th driest on record in Macomb (5.33 inches). Several places in the state have not seen dry conditions of this intensity in the early growing season since 1988. Consequently, the US Drought Monitor currently has 65% of the state in moderate drought (D1) and 15% of the state in severe drought (D2).

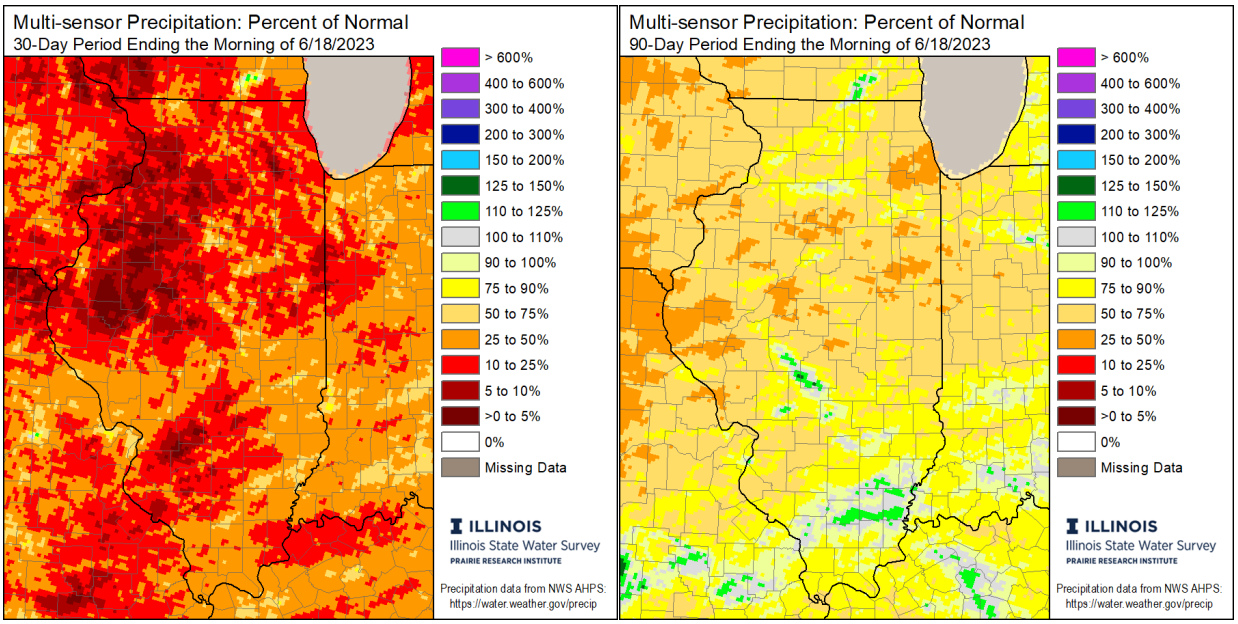

Figure 1. Maps show precipitation as a percent of normal over the last (left) 30 days and (right) 90 days

One silver lining of the drought is that – for the most part – we have avoided intense summer hear that often accompanies dry years like 2012 and 1988. Average temperatures since mid-May have mostly been within 1 degree of normal, with only the northwest corner of the state experiencing substantially warmer than normal conditions (Figure 2). The lack of humidity has helped nighttime low temperatures regularly dip into the low 50s and even the 40s across the state, even into the second week of June.

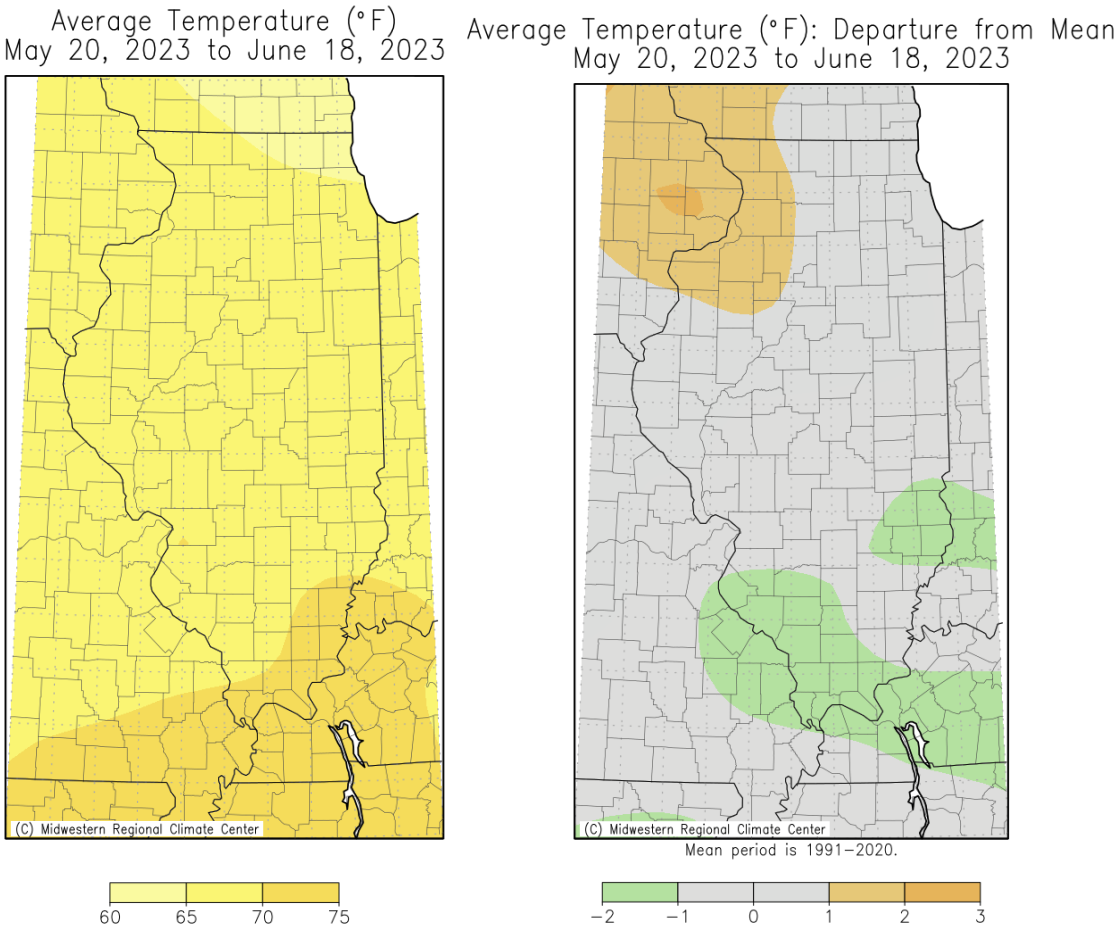

Figure 2. Maps show (left) average temperature and (right) temperature departures from normal over the last 30 days.

We need rain in Illinois, especially north of Interstate 70. For ecology, row crops, and pastures, we are quickly approaching a point where further very dry conditions in western, central, and northern Illinois will result in significant impacts. We will need more seasonably wet weather before we get too deep into July to avoid such impacts. The large-scale weather pattern that brought us our very dry May and early June has since broken down, allowing more active weather in the past week or so. However, much of central and northern Illinois have continued to miss the most beneficial rains that have clipped the southern part of the state. The most recent 8-10 day outlooks continue to show best chances of near normal precipitation as we move into July, which would be much welcomed across the state. However, the same models have been teasing us with forecasts of good rain potential just 7-10 days out that largely has not come to fruition.

Please report any drought impacts you have seen or heard of in your area, including impacts you have experienced firsthand in your operations, using the Condition Monitoring Observer Reporting (CMOR) system: go.illinois.edu/cmor. These reports are invaluable for drought monitoring and help federal and state partners most effectively direct resources to help with drought impacts.

Trent Ford, Illinois State Climatologist (217-244-1330; twford@illinois.edu)

Dry Weather and Fungicide Applications

As I write this, scattered showers are moving through much of southern Indiana. It is unclear yet how much moisture these showers will produce for any given area. What is clear is that May and June have been unusually dry for most of Indiana and Illinois. How will this dry spell affect overall disease pressure for the 2023 season?

First, most foliar diseases require leaf wetness in order for the disease to occur. Some exceptions are listed later. For this reason, I recommend a fungicide spray schedule of 7-14 days for most purposes. More frequent fungicide applications should occur during wet weather when conditions are most conducive to foliar diseases. When the weather is dry, applications can be spread out to 14 days or so. Cantaloupe and watermelon growers have the guesswork taken out of fungicide scheduling by the Purdue program MELCAST.

If one assumes that most vegetable plantings were conducted in early May, much of Indiana vegetable production experienced dry weather for about 30 days. I predict that this will result in less overall disease for the 2023 season. While many growers will have to deal with the consequences of this abnormally dry period, it may be reassuring to know that foliar disease will probably not be as severe as in most seasons.

You may be thinking that the weather may change to rainy and change our fortunes. True. But the dry weather in the initial portion of the season can't be changed and will probably lead to lower foliar disease levels overall. Let me explain.

Foliar disease severity is measured not only by the number of lesions that occur on foliage at the beginning of the season. But also by how many spores are produced by these lesions and whether the spores go on to produce additional lesions. That is, foliar disease severity is measured by the overall spread of the disease as the season progresses. Since the beginning of the season has been dry, little disease was initiated and little disease spread has occurred. So, even if the weather turns to a normal year weather-wise, it is very probable that overall, growers will observe less foliar disease on their crops.

Maybe an analogy is in order. Foliar disease increase can be compared to an interest accruing bank account. Let's assume each rain equals a specific amount of foliar disease and is represented by a deposit in the account. Foliar disease increases in relation to the length of leaf wetness, not the amount of rain. So, longer times of leaf wetness represent larger deposits. Let's also assume that our bank account will have a definite time period, like a crop season.

Bank accounts earn interest in a similar way to the increase in the rate of foliar diseases with time. Therefore, rainy periods represent deposits in our account. The rate of disease spread represents interest in the account. Dry weather is similar to a period with no deposits in our bank account.

What we have witnessed in the first 30 days or so of the season is a lack of deposits of any significance. So, even if it starts to rain soon and deposits are made into our account, and interest begins to accrue, the amount of funds in our account will be less than in a normal year due to the lack of rain (or deposits) at the start of the season.

It is possible that the season will turn very rainy and we will end up with very serious foliar disease of our vegetables. However, this would mean that the remainder of the season is much more rainy than normal to counter our dry season beginning. If normal rains begin, I predict vegetable diseases for most growers and locations for 2023 will be less than the average year. I should mention that if one regularly uses overhead irrigation, this factor will increase the possibility of foliar diseases and negate much of this discussion.

Some foliar diseases do not require much in the way of leaf wetness and therefore are an exception to the above discussion. For example, powdery mildew of many crops requires only high humidity. Downy mildew of cucurbit crops, if it blows into Indiana and Illinois this year, requires only heavy dews (last year, I observed no downy mildew of cucurbits in Indiana).

Soil-borne fungi, which may cause root diseases or vascular wilts, are not affected by leaf wetness or rains in the same way as foliar diseases.

Note I am not predicting the weather. I am predicting overall vegetable disease severity for 2023.

2023 may be a year when you can end up with lower expenses for fungicides for foliar diseases. When it is dry, it may be possible to spread out foliar fungicide applications to about 14 days. It may also be possible to use less expensive contact products in contrast with expensive systemic products. However, all growers should maintain a 7-14 day schedule of fungicides for most situations. It is also important to continue to scout fields for diseases, insects, and weeds.

This article was reprinted with permission from the Purdue Vegetable Crops Hotline
https://vegcropshotline.org/

Dan Egel, Extension Plant Pathologist, Southwest Purdue Agriculture Center (812-886-0198; egel@purdue.edu)

Less Seriously…

Working Hard or Hardly Working?

Stopped in to check on Mike and Brandon Huff of Sunnybrook Gardens and look what I found…just some happy pickers hanging out in the shade listening to music and having the best time! Mike was really pleased with his matted row strawberry crop this year and was very thankful to be able to utilize this harvest aid.

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