

Can I Still Plant Corn?

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As was feared back in May the huge problems facing Midwestern corn farmers has come to pass. Recent reports from Indiana (the third largest state in terms of acres of corn) that only 20% of the corn is planted and that growers are flocking to the NRCS to take prevented planting payments. At best we are seeing that perhaps 50 to 60% of the projected corn acres will get planted. Nationwide average corn yield will be 25 to 30 bushels per acre below last year's national average. The corn market is in shock. A number of farmers have called Dr. Ron Heiniger asking if they could still plant corn. The answer is – yes we can still plant corn. The top end yield potential is certainly lower but we can make a 100 to 150 bushel per acre crop. If prices make this attractive– then yes you can plant corn. Here are some things to think about if you do.

1. There must be enough early growth to set ear size. This means 30 to 45 days of good growing conditions after planting are needed. Drought or heat will reduce corn height and ear size. Irrigation will solve this, but without irrigation timely rainfall and moderate temperatures are needed from now until the first week in July. While this looks possible this year planting is NOT after June 15. The risk of heat and dry weather slowing down corn development is too great.
2. Temperatures MUST- MUST-MUST be below 95 °F and timely rainfall during pollination (VT through silking). Corn planted now will silk around the last week in July or the first week in August. The chances of rainfall in August start to increase due to tropical storm activity (or heaven forbid a hurricane) but for growers without irrigation this is a risk. This is particularly true for growers in the Piedmont where coastal storms are less likely to have much impact.
3. Plant the normal population – Increasing plant populations does no good if there isn't enough moisture to keep them growing.
4. Plant a later maturing hybrid – 114 to 118-day corn hybrid is best. Pollination must be pushed back into August to increase the chances of rainfall from tropical disturbances or storms.
5. The amount of N can be reduced since top end yield is limited by the amount of light captured due to a shorter growing period. 100 to 120 units of N should be adequate.
6. Use a good Viptera corn hybrid and plan on applying a fungicide at VT if corn looks like it has some yield potential. Insects and disease increase as the season progresses so use a hybrid with good corn earworm protection and fight diseases with fungicides.