

## Knee-high a tough mark to hit this year

Written by CAROL POMEDAY  
Tuesday, 02 July 2013 18:13

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<http://www.ozaukeepress.com/images/070413/farmLG.png>

### **Cold, wet spring has left most area corn well short of Fourth of July standard**

Corn is supposed to be knee-high by the Fourth of July, but only a few area farmers are seeing that this year because of the cold, rainy weather that only now seems to be returning to normal.

“The first stuff we planted is almost knee high, and the rest is just coming up,” said Jim Melichar, who operates a 1,700-head dairy farm in the Town of Port Washington and feeds all of his crops to his animals.

Of the 700 acres of corn he planted for silage, only 25 acres look good, Melichar said.



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“It’s been a crazy year. This is the wettest, stormiest June I’ve ever seen,” he said. “It’s quite interesting.”

Farther west in the Town of Saukville, Jeff Opitz, another dairy farmer with a large herd — about 1,100 cows — is pleased with his corn and other crops.

On Monday, he planted the last 28 acres of his 460 acres of corn.

“Most of it was planted in the middle of June, and it’s generally pretty good. We’re away from the lake and cold winds, and we have sandy soil that dries out faster,” Opitz said. “About three-quarters (of the corn) is going to be excellent. A lot of it is knee high.

“If you got it into the ground, it’s great weather. If you didn’t, it’s lousy weather.”

Both farmers grow corn for silage. They also grow alfalfa and oats, but purchase kernel corn and other feed for the cows that are milked three times a day.

Because of last year’s drought, both said they are close to running out of feed in their silos and will probably have to buy more.

Bill Janeshek, who grows corn, soybeans and other cash crops on his and his uncle’s farms about six miles west of Belgium, said only one of his cornfields is knee-high.

“Last year, it was over our heads,” he said. Although the rest of his corn crop is shorter, he expects good yields.

Janeshek, who works for the Ozaukee County Highway Department, said he’s had to take more vacation days than normal to plant and cut hay.

“Usually, I take a week off and get everything planted, but not this year. It’s been a day here and a day there,” he said.

That’s what every farmer has been doing in the area, with some having better luck than others.

“Dancing between the raindrops is all we’re doing,” Melichar said from his tractor as he was cutting hay Monday afternoon.

He has 700 acres in alfalfa and the first cutting produced 75% of a normal yield, he said.

“I transplanted some grasses to have tonnage, and hopefully it will be enough to make up for the losses,” Melichar said.

“The second cutting is two weeks away. It was hurt because the ground was so wet when we planted that a lot of it was compacted. We need warm weather, light showers and a lot of sunshine.”

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Melichar said the drought last year reduced his corn yields from 180 bushels of per acre to 140 bushels.

“We’re buying as much feed as we can as it becomes available,” he said. “We’re even trying to contract with other states, but everybody is trying to buy.”

Opitz, who buys about half of the feed for his cows, is finding the same scarcity and high prices as Melichar,

But his alfalfa looks good and the second cutting will be next week.

“It looks really good,” Opitz said. “The winter wheat was beat up, but it’s been perfect weather for alfalfa and oats.”

Farmers who grow peas, beans and sweet corn for Lakeside Foods’ processing plants in Belgium and Random Lake are several weeks behind schedule because of the weather, said Jeromy Nickelsen, general manager of the Belgium plant.

“Random Lake started three weeks later than last year, and they’re struggling with the first peas,” he said.

“They’re starting to plant sweet corn now, which should be OK.”

If farmers miss their harvest date, either because crops aren’t ready or the weather doesn’t cooperate, they are paid a smaller amount than if vegetables are harvested.

Lakeside expects to house 160 migrant workers for both plants at its camp in Belgium, but so far only an initial startup crew is here.

“When we do contracts (with workers), there’s a window for hiring,” Nickelsen said. “When we get notification from the field department when we’ll be ready to start, they will start making their way up here.”

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Image Information: WALKING THROUGH A field Monday that was only recently planted

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because of cold, wet weather, Adam Melichar and his 2-year-old son Grant inspected corn that will only be a few inches high by the Fourth of July. Melichar and his father Jim, who farm land in the Town of Port Washington, were able to plant a small portion of their crop earlier in the season. That corn is about up to Grant's shoulders. Photo by Sam Arendt