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Hail-Damaged Crops Require Evaluation

For immediate release

(Greeley, Colo.) Hail storms last week in Weld County damaged crops, leaving producers with the challenge of whether to replant or to plant another crop.

Severe winds in the path of the tornado and the hail events caused damage to crops and livestock operations along its path. As with any weather-related crop damage it is best to assess the damage five to seven days after the event. Often this does not allow adequate time for replant decisions to be made.

Generally damage from light to heavy was reported along a line from Gilcrest to the Weld/Larimer County line, running through the towns of Greeley on the west side and Windsor. At least 18 center pivot irrigation systems sustained damage with some of those flipped completely over.

While reports of small to 1.5-inch hail were fairly common along this line, areas of Weld County reported hail the size of baseballs. Luckily these larger stones were the exception and not very widespread.

For many producers, replant options may be limited by previous herbicide selection, timing and wet fields. Many areas received heavy rains with the hail, delaying producers' reentry into fields. Potential yield loss of the existing crop vs. replanting costs and potential reduced yields needs to be considered. In some cases, the reduced yield of a hail-damaged field may be higher than the potential yield from replanting.

It's too late to replant corn for grain and replanting beans could mean up to a 15-20% potential yield reduction. Estimated yield losses for sorghum are slightly less than for beans at this time.

Do not do anything with your field before you notify the proper government agency such as the Farm Service Agency and—if you plan to make a claim—your insurance provider. Discuss replant options and limits; when they'll be able to determine the severity of the loss and their assessment of the loss. Next, consider your investment in the crop, additional expenses and expected yield at this point.

Weed and pest control will continue to be costly, and weed control may be even more difficult if the crop canopy is open. Be sure to consider herbicide replant options for this year as well as next year if applying herbicide this late in the season.

If hail has hit your alfalfa field cutting may be warranted. Alfalfa growth originates for the tip of the stem. The amount of damage and nearness to harvest both affect this decision. Cut immediately if plants have reached late bud stage and more than 25% of plant tips are broken. For younger plants, cut if one-half or more of the plant's growing tips are injured.

Harvest or shred anytime more than two-thirds of the plant tips are broken, regardless of how much growth exists, unless the hail was so severe that only stubble remains. After these early cuttings, delay your next harvest to allow plants extra time to recover.

Hail damage assessment and management options vary according to plant stage; however the procedures are fairly similar from crop to crop and stage to stage:

- estimate the growth stage;
- assess the damage; and
- consider options if yield potentials are low.

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