

IFB District 12 Director Douglas County Agriculture update for July 2021

By Larry W. Dallas

July has been a wet month in Douglas County. Our weather source says we have gone from 2.5 inches of rain below average to 2 above average, in the space of about two weeks. The excess rain has changed the look of our crops. There are now dead places in the corn where water stood too long. Big areas of soybean fields have a decidedly yellow hue.

What this will do to yields is still a guess. Overall, the corn still looks good. Corn is a tropical plant and likes a lot of rain. Constantly saturated soil is not good, however. The yellow areas of the soybean fields may still yield well. Growth has certainly been slowed.

One way to determine plant health is with tissue testing. Leaves of the crop plants are removed and analyzed for nutrient content. An Illini FS agronomist showed me the results of corn leaf tests he had performed since the wet weather kicked in. These were mostly borderline adequate for the important nutrient nitrogen. One set of tests from a field in Edgar County showed a deficiency

already. The plants will need nitrogen as they begin to fill the kernels.

Nitrogen in the nitrate form is easily lost out of saturated soil as we have had recently. There is no good way to put additional nitrogen on 10 feet tall corn. It would be difficult to get a ground applicator through a cornfield now. Aerial applications are usually low volume and would not be able to provide many pounds of nitrogen.

The constant wet weather is also causing disease concerns. Leaf disease in both corn and soybeans is enhanced by damp conditions. Prices for both are good and many farmers want to protect the yield they have. You have probably seen spray planes running these last couple of weeks. Fungicide is being applied to both soybean and cornfields to head off disease.

At the same time, we have more water than we would like, far northern Illinois remains extremely dry. My counterpart on the Illinois Farm Bureau Board from Winnebago County had a half-inch of rain at the same time we had nearly six inches. The Dakotas and south-

ern Canada are dry too. The spring wheat crop ratings, a major crop in that area, decrease each week.

A rough year for South American farmers continues. After a bad drought in several areas, the second crop corn has been frosted at least twice in recent days. Most projections for South American corn bushels are well below the initial estimates. That means more customers for our corn since it cannot be purchased from Brazil or Argentina. They are rolling with the punches. Brazil is forecast to plant three percent more soybeans next year. That is about equal to the acres of soybeans the state of Illinois plants each year.

The market analysts say that we are in a weather market. Each new forecast is anticipated and analyzed to see what areas might get rain or miss out. Western Europe has been getting record heavy rain. The wheat areas of southern Russia are becoming dry in the last condition reports.

A great deal of attention is focused on the grain balance sheets. The leftover stocks from last year

plus prospective production minus expected use of all crops are watched carefully. The corn and soybean balance sheets are close this year. A hiccup in crop size or increase in demand would make the leftover stocks of both crops uncomfortably small. Stay tuned.

As noted last month, Illinois Farm Bureau is sponsoring Nutrient Stewardship meetings across the state. I attended one last week in Coles County. Several farmers talked about things they are doing to prevent soil and nutrient loss. Changing fertilization techniques and tillage practices usually are the first methods tried. Cover crops were being used by many of these farmers as well. Illinois farmers are working to cut nutrient loss from our farms.

Another speaker was with the University of Illinois Cooperative Extension coordinating the Embarras River watershed plan. They have been working to increase awareness of nutrient loss in the watershed. Both the Embarras and the Kaskaskia watersheds differ widely from top to bottom. In the flat black soils of Champaign and

Douglas Counties, nitrogen loss is a large problem. The rolling hills of southern Illinois have more soil erosion and more phosphorus loss since it attaches to soil particles. Very different solutions are needed in the two areas.

Agricultural nutrient loss is called nonpoint nutrient loss because there is no specific location for the loss. It comes generally from a whole field or area. Another speaker at the meeting is working with the City of Charleston to reduce the point source nutrient loss from their sewage disposal plant. Charleston is aggressively working to cut the phosphorus coming out of that plant. Nutrient loss is both urban and rural.

We have been mowing when it is not raining and hauling the last bin of corn we had left on the farm. Usually, by the end of July, the yards are starting to dry up and do not need to be mowed as often. That has not happened yet here. We still need to clean the last seed beans out of the planter. We left them thinking we might plant in some of the ponds but it is pretty late for that. The other spring equipment needs to be

cleaned up and moved to the back of the shed.

The wheat has mostly been cut and in most cases, soybeans planted into the stubble. Double crop soybeans are common in southern Illinois. They are a better bet in this area than 30 years ago. The wheat comes off a little sooner and the average killing frost is later. The soybeans get an increased chance of success.

Wheat and oats are not widely planted in Douglas County. Other areas of the country are more suited. The U of I continues to do extensive research on both crops, looking for varieties that fit this climate and soil. A third crop to break up the corn-soybean relay most of us would now be beneficial to the soil and to stopping nutrient loss. Oats grow heavier in weight in cooler climates. Wheat is grown worldwide. Corn and soybeans are a good fit here.

Thank you for reading about Douglas County Agriculture this month.

POWER

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retire its Byron Generating Station and Dresden Generating Station (in Morris), resulting in the loss of four nuclear generation units that supply clean, zero-emissions energy to more than four million homes and businesses in Northern Illinois. Byron will close in September 2021, and Dresden in November 2021.

Exelon says the early retirements are the result of market rules that favor polluting power plants over carbon-free nuclear energy.

Dresden and Byron face revenue shortfalls in the hundreds of millions of dollars because of declining energy prices and market rules that allow fossil fuel plants to underbid clean resources at auctions where they bid on compensation for the power that they will provide at some point in the future.

In Downstate Illinois, most power comes from coal-fired generation; some from natural gas, and some from the Exelon plants.

All of the market-based, coal-fired generation is scheduled to retire before the end of 2027.

Prairie State Energy Campus near Marissa, which is not market based, has private contracts and is the largest coal plant and most modern in the state. It has contracts with co-ops, with municipalities, and with out-of-state entities. It is not scheduled to close but is threatened by new

regulation.

Similarly threatened is the CWLP plant in Springfield, which only services Springfield, Ill., and is not scheduled to close.

The Southern Illinois Power Cooperative Lake of Egypt plant is down to one operating unit, with not much activity underway to extend its life span.

For most of the businesses operating in the Ameren Illinois footprint, most of the power comes from coal-fired power plants that are scheduled to close by the end of 2027. That was not the result of a state policy issue; that was an issue resolved by the Trump administration, which had eased the regulatory burden on plants, allowing them to escape having to implement expensive environmental upgrades if they agreed to close by 2028.

Observers say that even if the Legislature does not pass an energy bill, energy policy will still happen because of market forces that are bringing about change.

Negotiators were close to a deal until the last day of the session, May 31.

Exelon announced it had an agreement on a subsidy for the nuclear fleet with the Governor's Office for \$694 million spread out over five years, which would guarantee that no nuclear power plant in Illinois would close during that time.

The utility industry thought it had a bill before environmental advocates balked because of a lack of commitment by the energy

industry to closing plants that relied on fossil fuels. Those groups wanted such plants to start curbing emissions as early as 2024. Few of them could survive under such restrictions, their operators said.

Energy supporters said the way the bill's language was being written ignored the economics, and Prairie State, CWLP and all modern, natural-gas-fired power plants were seen as at risk of premature closure.

Additionally, several large, natural gas facilities now in planning or construction could have lost their financing had the bill passed.

Senate President Don Harmon, D-Oak Park, said there was significant concern in the utility industry.

"People could be out of a job Monday if we passed that bill today," he told reporters in July.

Since the end of May, negotiations have continued but a resolution is not any closer, and other issues have cropped up in the meantime. Getting agreement between unions and environmental groups is seen as a key.

Late in July, the Citizens Utility Board, a utility watchdog, sent out a notice to members, encouraging them to contact their legislators in an attempt to get progress moving on talks.

"For weeks now, CUB and other members of the Illinois Clean Jobs Coalition have been trying to hammer out a strong, pro-consumer energy bill before the end of summer. The fight is still very much

alive. We want to hold utilities accountable and secure clean and affordable energy in Illinois," the agency said.

The taxpayer cost of the bill has been estimated at \$1 billion in its first year and about \$1.8 billion over the first 10 years.

About half the cost would be for renewable energy – some \$360 million to \$380 million, but not covering the utility industry's concern of replacing coal- and nature gas-fired plants that are scheduled to go offline.

The rest of the renewable energy subsidy is comprised of distributive generation, which is made up of rooftop energy, small batteries for business and home use; and about \$800 million overall (\$90 million in the first year) for a program where solar panels and battery storage would be installed at retiring coal plants.

The Exelon nuclear fleet subsidy represents about 14 percent of the overall cost.

Another \$240 million or so would go toward social programs related to the energy industry – such as job training and equity programs.

Equity provisions, renewable energy investments, nuclear subsidies and low-income assistance programs, among other provisions in the energy bill, are largely funded through added charges to ratepayer bills. Cost breakdowns in some of the past public bill language show added costs of \$3-4 month-

ly for the average residential ratepayer.

A coalition of business groups and labor unions held a news conference in late June questioning the transparency of ongoing energy negotiations.

Illinois Manufacturers' Association President and CEO Mark Denzler said businesses fear there may be a cost shift in future drafts of the bill, charging businesses \$12 more monthly, with industrial charges increasing possibly over \$1,900 monthly.

He said the governor's office failed to provide rate cost estimates, studies on reliability, or the impact on job loss from companies asked to pay significantly higher electric bills.

In response to that, Jordan Abudayyeh, a spokesman for Gov. Pritzker, said the governor has been clear that any energy legislation must address climate change by making meaningful progress toward moving Illinois to a renewable energy future while also protecting consumers.

It's still unclear if, or when, a finalized version of the energy bill will be reached, but many equity advocates are cautiously optimistic that a compromise will be made before the end of the calendar year, while business groups are calling on the governor to slow the process down.

Energy industry advocates believe that consumer costs go up every time a utility takes a generator off line.

According to a 2018 study by PJM, a regional

transmission organization that coordinates the movement of wholesale electricity in all or parts of 13 states and the District of Columbia, closing down coal-fired operations is costly to the consumer. The study concludes that in northern Illinois for every thousand megawatts of coal you take off line, the price of power goes up by 40 to 50 cents per megawatt hour.

Additionally, no one has studied what impact that closing the entire fossil fuel generation system could have on costs as a result, analysts say.

Whether Illinois would have to turn to surrounding states for power is also a question, since those states are also lacking in supply or have intermittent capacity and would always serve their own states' needs first. The costs utilities pay for that power could also skyrocket.

Ironically, if the plants in Illinois close, utility officials say they would turn to outside coal-fired sources for power generation, and they would have to pay more for it.

The chances of building more nuclear plant capacity in Illinois are seen as unlikely because previously approved deregulation makes it impossible to guarantee a builder would get back its costs.

Some information contributed by Capitol News Illinois.

RESOURCES

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perienced throughout the pandemic. Full-time students enrolled in at least 12 credit hours can request up to \$1,000 and part-time students enrolled in three to 11 credit hours can request up to \$500 to assist with educational expenses.

The request form will be available in the Laker Hub, the student portal.

Students who previously were enrolled at Lake Land, but had to withdraw in Spring 2020, Summer 2020, Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 due to the pandemic are eligible to receive a tuition waiver for up to five credit hours. The college will be notify-

ing these eligible students via a letter in the coming weeks.

The college will also be equipping some classrooms with state-of-the-art HyFlex Model technology, allowing faculty to provide instruction to students who are physically present while also enabling students to attend virtually if desired. Lake Land Col-

lege has collaborated with SynapSIS, Inc. of Springfield to implement this technology for dual credit courses as part of the Rural Education Delivery System (REDS) project. The REDS project connected the college to five rural high school sites via high definition video and audio conferencing capabilities.

This fully integrated

system is powered by the Eagle Eye Director by Polycom and has touchscreen display boards, Eagle-eye motion sensitive cameras and ceiling microphones. The system's people-tracking technology automatically zooms in on the active speaker, allowing faculty, students and other presenters to better engage with the

learning experience.

Enabling instructors to simultaneously teach in-person and online classes, the HyFlex Model expands the flexibility for students to access educational services and resources via a variety of situations.

For more information on these resources visit lakelandcollege.edu.

BOARD

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Munson has a list of county projects to submit to Bell-

wether and will be consulting with municipalities in the county in regards to other projects.

As a final note in regards to the Road Use Agreement

with EDPR regarding the Industrial Wind Complex in Newman and Murdock Townships, the funds for the road work were not deposited on July 22, 2021

as required. EDPR has not contested the bid for road work and has therefore agreed to the contract. The RUA states that the funds (\$12,430,896.24) are to be

deposited. Due to the delays this will cause, Murdock and Newman Townships will be faced with poor drainage in the ditches and hazardous road conditions for the fore-

seeable future.

EDPR will be contacted regarding this. We can hope that they will not change their address without notification again.

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- Hunan Fine Asian Cuisine – Downtown Diner – Burger King