

# Rains, wet fields hamper early planting



PHOTO BY DANIEL DIVILIO

The volume of rain having fallen over the past few weeks may delay farmers from planting this year's corn crop due to flooding in fields such as this one located near Greensboro.

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DENTON With the spring season starting out rather wet, many area farmers are finding themselves unable to prepare for the upcoming planting season.

Shannon Dill, director of Talbot County's University of Maryland Extension Office, reported March 29 that over the last few weeks, the area has averaged one to two inches of rain per week.

Those rains, Dill said, have left many farm fields either flooded or too muddy to plant vegetables or prepare the land for the upcoming corn and soybean crops. She said the rain is also drowning out the small grain crop planted in the fall and grown over the winter.

"The ground just has not had the time to dry up," Dill said.

Royal Oak farmer John Swaine III said the area keeps getting hit with rain from coastal storms. What the area needs right now, Swaine said, is some sunshine and time off from the wet weather.

"We did not need all this," he said of the rain that has so far fallen.

While it is not yet time to plant this year's corn and soybean crops, Dill said, farmers would be otherwise prepping their land for them. She said farmers are not able to go into their fields and till the soil or spread manure as they normally would this time of year.

"This is really an ideal time to get out and do any field work," said Dill, noting that most planting comes after April 15, when no more frosts are expected to occur.

Harry Moreland, of the Caroline County Farm Bureau and a farmer himself, said he and other local farmers are unable to perform that necessary fieldwork for the upcoming season.

"It's just very, very discouraging," said Moreland of the wet weather.

With the rain delaying the necessary prep work for the planting season, he said, local farmers are going to have to perform the tasks in a much smaller timeframe than usual.

"All of our workload's going to be condensed to a very short time," Moreland said.

Mid-Atlantic Farm Credit's Kenny Bounds said the rains have definitely impacted a lot of his company's borrowing farmers. Bounds said the wet weather and flooding are hampering farmers' efforts to install irrigation systems or to implement other best management practices.

"All of that's been delayed," he said.

Bounds said he also expects the bad weather to affect the timely planting of this year's corn crop.

"It's definitely going to have an economical impact," he said of the rain.

Dill said she remains optimistic for this year's corn season, though she pointed out that farmers do not want to plant the crop too late in May. If the good planting window passes corn farmers by, she said, they could switch to soybeans for the season, which are planted later.

"They still have quite a few options," said Dill of local farmers.

The past year, Dill said, has made it tough for agriculture experts to define a standard growing season. She said farmers dealt with an abnormally rainy spring and fall and heavy snow over the winter, which affected planting, growth and harvesting cycles.

"I'm not sure what a normal growing period is anymore," Dill said.

She said farmers do their best to manage such risks by purchasing crop insurance, using irrigation systems and keeping up with the continual research being conducted to make corn and soy heartier and more resilient crops.

Swaine said local farmers need the rain to stop for a little while so they can get out into their fields and have them ready in two to three weeks, when the time is right to plant corn.

"We can miss a couple rains right now and it wouldn't hurt anything," he said.