For Immediate Release

October Especially Wet, New Frost Record Set in Waterloo

Chatham, ON (Oct 31, 2011) – A difficult harvest through a very rainy October has had at least one bright spot. The late arrival of this year's fall frost gave crops an extra few weeks to mature, with the first wide-spread freeze hitting southwestern Ontario last Thursday night.

This season's frost-free period was actually one of the longest in history in many centres. The Kitchener-Waterloo area in fact broke a record, with a frost-free span of 175 days which ended on October 22nd, according to the University of Waterloo. Beaten by just one day, the previous record of 174 days was set back in 1941.

Even climatologists at Environment Canada were surprised by the lack of early-autumn frost.

"There had been some cool mornings so far this October," said spokesperson Jeff Coulson, "but no nights that got down to -2 or -3 degrees Celcius like we'd usually see this time of year."

Damage from the frost was minimal as most plants were mature enough – but quality is still deteriorating as crops stand out in the damp weather. Farmers continue, however, to face this year's greater challenge of getting crops off the fields, due to the tremendous amounts of rainfall.

Weather and agriculture specialist Karla Jackson of Weather INnovations Incorporated (www.weatherinnovations.com) reported that many fields are still too wet to harvest, although most corn is averaging well at 20-per-cent moisture. Most soybeans, while not dry, are ready to harvest, but the fields are often too soggy for machines. She said that some regions received double or even triple the rain this October compared to previous years.

"Hanover is one of the more extreme cases, with approximately 150 mm for the month," she explained. "Comparatively, they had only about 56 mm last year and the 30-year average is around 84 mm."

Another standout was Elora, which had over 140 mm, crushing the October average of 24 mm. Other areas of note included Chatham (118 mm), Hamilton (137 mm) and Toronto (120 mm) – all more-or-less doubling the monthly averages of 67, 72 and 63 mm respectively.

Jackson pointed to the massive downpours throughout SWO during the storm over October 19th and 20th. Many fields were flooded in locations around Hamilton, which saw a whopping 60 mm, and others such as Chatham (52 mm), Elora (42 mm) and Petrolia (40 mm).

"Chatham-Kent had some of the highest numbers," said Jackson, "for instance Ridgetown got 55 mm over the two days. Dresden had almost 41 mm, which accounts for half of their total accumulation for the entire month."

She said because of the delays harvesting corn and soybeans, some growers have had to put off planting their winter wheat. A few have even returned their seed and will forgo planting entirely. Many are also seeing increased incidences of diseases such as ear rot in corn and other problems stemming from the over-abundance of moisture.

According to Dale Cowan, senior agronomist at AGRIS Co-operative Ltd, the small acreages in their trading area that have been seeded with winter wheat are showing uneven emergence due to the flooding.

"The saturated soil creates a lack of oxygen," he said, "which leads to unhealthy stands or even seed death. Soybeans in a few fields are also starting to show mold inside the pods in places that were flooded," he explained, "especially around Muirkirk and Essex."

On the bright side, however, he said the yields from acreages that growers have managed to harvest have met or exceeded their expectations from the September Great Lakes Grain crop tour.

"Some yields are phenomenal," he said "Soybeans at 50 bushels per acre, as well as May- and even a few June-planted corn fields coming in at 200 bushels per acre."

Jackson also had more good news for corn growers, reporting that Weather INnovations is developing several new online tools such as a dry-down date calculator. This web-based tool will use a mathematical model to analyze multiple factors including weather forecasts and planting date, in order to estimate an optimal date for harvest. Visit www.weatherinnovations.com for more on the dry-down calculator and Weather Innovations' many other research projects.

Weather INnovations Incorporated (WIN) – www.weatherinnovations.com
WIN specializes in providing turnkey weather-based monitoring and modelling solutions for agribusinesses, producer organizations, government agencies, researchers and others. WIN makes its models easier to use at the farm level by providing a connection to innovative research with site-specific applications.

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