

## **Pros and Cons of Letting Corn Stand in the Field Through Winter**

Due to late corn planting dates and below normal heat units the 2004 growing season has resulted in a crop that is behind normal development. As of October 18th, corn in NW Wisconsin to be harvested for grain is only 5-10% complete, as compared to a normal year where we would be around 30% complete. Because corn dries down at a very slow rate in the late fall and November can bring about adverse weather, some farmers may consider leaving their corn in the field through the winter and harvesting in the spring.

Every year some producers harvest corn fields in the late winter/early spring. If the stalks stay standing and there isn't much ear drop, snow cover or wildlife damage; the crop can get through the winter without much yield loss. Ear drop will vary by hybrid and environmental conditions as well as the amount of grain on the ear (smaller ears should stay attached better than larger ears). If winter conditions are cool without snow then corn will continue to dry and can be harvested throughout the winter without too much yield loss. Stalks will become brittle and broken corn parts may decrease the grade causing discounts at the elevator.

Since we cannot predict the weather, the most prudent decision would be to harvest after a reasonable period of drydown. In some years with heavy snow cover, grain yield can decrease significantly. According to a UW-Extension research trial, during 2000 grain yield decreased 65% by March and by spring yield decreased 37% from an October harvest date. This is contrasted with the winter following 2001 (little snow cover) when yield only decreased 18% by February and by spring was 10% lower than October harvest.

Greatest grain moisture loss occurs during October and November. Drying continues through the winter, but at a slower rate than October and November. Since grain moisture changes are minimal past December and grain yield losses can be significantly affected by environment, the best decision is to complete harvest by December (or the typical first heavy snowfall, if you are good at predicting such things).

For more information contact the Polk County Extension Office at 715-485-8600.