

Harvesting Lodged Corn

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Harvest seems to be moving along, although corn seems to be rolling in slower than usual. Our strong winds on October 20-21 caused havoc in many corn fields in the area. The sustained winds were between 30 and 45 mph and higher gusts. The top wind speed on October 20 was 59 mph in Goodland and 66 mph in Colby. The top speeds on October 21 was 41 mph at Bird City and 55 mph at Goodland. These winds caused severely lodged and corn ears laying on the ground.

While wind wasn't the only contributing factor to lodged corn, it played a big role. There are many other factors, from throughout the growing season, that contributed to the lodged corn. They include stalk rots, early first hard freeze, delayed planting, dry conditions at the end of grain fill, and weak ear shanks.

So, what how do you proceed with harvesting this lodged corn? The first answer is to proceed slowly. Reducing the speed of the combine can help lodged corn stalks feed into the header and help salvage those ears that hanging on 'by a thread'. In addition, harvesting against the lean of the stalks can help them feed into the header. This may mean harvesting a field going only one direction and 'deadheading' back. It will make for some slow harvesting, but you will likely leave less corn on the ground.

Here are some tips from Ohio State University for reducing losses when harvesting lodged corn:

- Set gathering chains for more aggressive operation with points opposite each other and relatively closer together. Adjust deck plates over snapping rolls only slightly wider than cornstalks so that they hold stalks but not so narrow that stalks wedge between the plates.
- Operate the head as low as practical without picking up rocks or significant amounts of soil.
- Single-direction harvesting against the grain of leaning stalks may help. Evaluate losses though before spending large amounts of time dead-heading through the field.
- Limited field measurements suggest a corn reel may or may not help limit machine losses; however, a reel may allow greater travel speed and improves productivity.
- If harvest speeds are significantly reduced, the amount of material going through the combine is reduced. Fan speed may need to be reduced to avoid blowing kernels out of the combine. Rotor speed may need to be reduced to maintain grain quality. Check kernel losses behind the combine and grain quality to fine tune cleaning and threshing adjustments.
- Grain platforms have been used to harvest corn in relatively severe cases. More cornstalks and material other than grain enters the combine. Expect capacity to be reduced somewhat. Concave clearance may need to be increased for increased throughput and fan speed may need to be increased to aid separation in the cleaning shoe.

I have links to several articles on harvesting lodged corn posted on my website at www.sunflower.ksu.edu/agronomy. If you have any questions, please contact me at the K-State Experiment Station in Colby or one of the local K-State Extension Offices in Goodland, St. Francis or Sharon Springs. You can also see what I am finding in the field by following me on facebook at K-State Sunflower District Agronomy.

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