Weighty snow takes tops off stalks; fields too wet to harvest.

As more than a foot of heavy, wet snow smothered the city Thursday night and Friday morning, corn in area fields shrank.

At least that's how Gothenburg area producer Joe Wahlgren described the situation Friday morning.

"It got shorter overnight," he said, noting that the past two of three snows this October have taken the tops from cornstalks.

Substantial snow fell Oct. 9-10, Oct. 22 and last Thursday and Friday.

"The third snow took the rest of the tops and most are down to the ear," he said. "But the ears there are still good."

Considering stress from heavy snow—18 inches where the Wahlgrens live about 8 miles west of Gothenburg—Wahlgren said the stalks have weathered well.

"Given what it's gone through, the stalk is still standing," he said. "Cornfields with standability problems are worse off. The corn standing fine is just waiting for us to pick it but it can't do this forever."

With soggy fields and more rain—and even lightning—Monday morning, Wahlgren said it will be at least this weekend before farmers can drive combines through corn rows.

Wahlgren is taking a wait-and-see approach as to how much of the family corn crop is harvestable, noting that he doesn't know any producer who's picked more than 5%.

"And if it hits the ground, you can't get to it," he said.

With large cornfields yet to harvest, it would be impossible to complete the task by hand like old timers did often into March.

In the meantime, he said producers are frustrated but know they are not in control.

"All of this will be behind us soon but it does get frustrating," Wahlgren said. "It's not the end of the world. The fruits of our labor are out there and we keep getting delayed to finish out the year."

The last time Wahlgren remembers ears on the ground in 1997, some farmers lost about 40 bushels to the acre.

That was because a cool growing season caused problems with ear shank and many kerneled cobs fell to the ground.

If that scenario repeats itself this year, Wahlgren said he'll have five million ears lying in the snow.

On a more positive note, Wahlgren and his hired men are finished harvesting soybeans and popcorn.

In his farming neighborhood, Wahlgren estimated about 80% to 90% of the soybeans have been harvested.

For soybeans still in the field, he said he hasn't seen any pods pop open yet.

Wahlgren added that snow in October has happened before and "will happen again."

"Most guys are trying to remain positive," he said.

Statewide, ag officials say only 15% of the 2009 corn crop has been harvested which marks the slowest harvest on record since 1982.

Adding to frustration is the fact that the nation's 2009 corn crop is predicted to be the largest on record if farmers can get it out of the fields.

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