Area damage estimated at millions of dollars

Devastating is how Jeremy Sitorius describes last Thursday's windstorm that yanked off ears and snapped cornstalks in half.

Central Nebraska Public Power Irrigation District records show winds gusting to 60 mph for about 10 hours with average sustained winds at 48 mph.

Steve Johnson of The Home Agency said he didn't know Tuesday how many acres were affected but described corn loss in the millions of dollars.

One of his fields, where ears lay scattered and stalks felled, was worth an estimated $100,000, Sitorius said.

Another that was yielding 225 bushels an acre on average early Thursday morning plummeted to a 130-bushel average in gale-force winds.

"Nobody needed this right now" he said. "You feel so helpless. With input costs, it's a heckuva sum."

Both Sitorius and area farmer Travis Peterson agreed that the drought, causing the driest year

on record, contributed to the mess.

“There’s no stalk quality for the ear to stay on,” Peterson said. “It would have been better if the stalk was knocked over and the ears stayed on.”

Peterson had just started corn harvest when the wind roared in from the northwest.

He and other farmers are thinking of innovative ways to salvage what they can.

Already, Peterson said he borrowed a rake from a neighbor to pile downed corn in the winnows.

An attachment to his combine will pick up the grain.

“Hopefully we can pick up 40 to 80 bushels from the ground,” he said.

Sitorius said he expects to see a lot of innovation in the next month.

Harvesters will have to be patient.

Combines must move slower to pick up downed corn and, in some cases, progress in the same direction across fields instead of up and back.

Sitorius worries even more about stress and fatigue.

“With the drought, irrigation was an expense. We started and never shut off,” he explained. “I don’t mind pushing through harvest if the crop is good and abundant.”

By Sitorius’s estimates, corn harvest in the Gothenburg area is about 30% to 50% complete.

For Peterson, the challenge doesn’t end after harvest when he grazes cattle on stalks.

“If too much corn is left out there, the cattle will die,” he said.

In Gothenburg, power was out for approximately 45 minutes during the storm in some areas of the city, mostly in the northwest quadrant

Property owners started clearing away torn branches, limbs and other debris Thursday night when the wind died down.

The city crew worked for about two days removing debris left by street trees.

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