

As we have been flying our drones over customers fields throughout our territory we are seeing many with a condition known as "willowing". As this may be a new term to many we wanted to break down what exactly it is and what we believe may have caused it.

What is Willowing?

When we reference a cornfield as "Willowing" we are referring to wind damage where the plants roots and lower stalk remain intact and the upper half of the plant begins to bend. This has been a new concept in the area based on when the storms have hit in comparison to the growth stage of the corn plant. In prior years many in our area have experienced Green Snap damage due to similar storms, this type of damage most commonly occurs during the V12-Tassel growth stages when the plant is the most susceptible. This year most of our wind events occurred after the corn was already pollinated meaning we were out of the high-risk window for the corn to green snap, but the storms were still strong enough to cause the Willowing effect we are seeing.

Why Does Willowing Occur?

As we look at the 2021 growing season overall many factors have come together to create excellent growing conditions for this crop. One of the negatives of these conditions is that in many different cases plant height, and ear placement, on many of these hybrids have been pushed higher than we are used to seeing them in the past. When the wind storms came through and the roots did not lodge and the stalks did not green snap something had to give on a plant that was already taller than normal.

What We Know

The good news is that the plant has a pretty good reservoir system for nutrients, and it is going to need to mobilize as much as it can to hopefully help finalize kernel fill. So how long do we have until black layer? The R4 stage typically lasts 6-12 days depending on GDU accumulation, and on average R5 takes 30 days from the first dents to black layer. Depending on the field, we have around 30 days left of grain fill, and they will be extremely important for the corns success. Ultimately what will drive yield effects will be the corns ability to get the ear leaf unshaded. The ear leaf will drive yield to the ear, if the corn can recover enough to allow the upper half of the plant to absorb sunlight, it should give it a greater chance of success. If we can mobilize what we need from the plants lower leaves and still benefit from photosynthesis, the corn should have the ability to come out hopefully relatively unscathed.