Be Cautious When Selecting Hybrids for 2017, based on a 2016 Midwest Crop and Weather Review

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We experienced a year of weather extremes across the Midwest in 2016. We started out with warm temperatures in mid to late April which got the field work and corn planters rolling. Then we experienced a cold snap the first week of May which slowed progress. The first 3 weeks of June was hot and dry. A lot of acres were only 3-5 days away from a significant yield reduction due to lack of rain. Then the rains came in late July and most of us received weekly precipitation through mid-August. In most regions the fuller season hybrids took advantage of the above average heat and moisture with very high top end yields.

Spring
Mid-April the temperatures climbed into the upper 70’s and lower 80’s across the Midwest. This got the tractors rolling working ground and planting seed. We experienced 2 good weeks of planting and corn was spiking trough in some fields. May came and temperatures dropped to night time lows in the 40’s the first full week. This slowed seedling growth and some farmers held up planting waiting for warmer temperatures. Late May I started getting calls, “Poor stands in my corn field.” After a few of these calls I realized majority of issues were linked to the May 5, 6, 7 planting date. Fields got worked or planted, then we received a rain the next day or two and the top layer of soil was crusted about like concrete not letting the seedlings push through. Needless to say a few fields had to be replanted.

Summer
Summer came a brought a much needed rain. We experienced 14 days of 90 degree heat which led to the 2nd hottest and 4th driest June in the past 25 years (Figure A). I was scouting fields in mid-June and took this picture showing the corn rolled up and big cracks in the ground (Figure B). The rains started around the 20th of June and we experienced weekly rains in most regions across Midwest through August. With the above average heat and rainfall we were setting up for a big crop.
Fall
Fall arrived and farmers began harvest. Some started when corn was around 21-23 percent moisture but after about 10 days the moisture in our corn really dropped quickly to 16-17 percent. Yields were above average in most regions and farmers saved money on drying cost. With the above average heat and rainfall the fuller season hybrids seemed to dominate in plots and whole field averages. Harvest has come to an end in most regions across the Midwest. Recently, producers have concentrated on field work and putting on anhydrous. Cool/cold temperatures and rain/snow moving in will slow most of the field work or conclude it till next spring.

Summary
With the 2nd hottest June in the past 25 years and weekly rain through August the fuller season hybrids really showed their upper end yield potential. Looking at the past 25 years we have had 6 years of significant heat and in most of those years below average precipitation throughout the summer. So I would definitely caution on selecting a hybrid lineup consisting of fuller season products. We never know what next year will bring. My advice is to curve your risk and go with the averages and select a hybrid lineup of diverse genetics and maturities.

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