

## Spring Planting Looms

*Tools and common sense can combat cold, wet fields*

Punxsutawney Phil predicted six more weeks of winter when he saw his shadow in February, but as the farm show season wraps up, spring planting is on the minds of producers. The interesting and often extreme weather conditions we had this winter may cause delays in planting as we move into this crucial time of the year.

### The science behind it

The extreme drought in 2012 and the extreme cold of this winter were caused by lack of blocking, or high pressure, followed by the re-development of very strong of blocking. In a normal scenario, "Blocking in the spring and summer forces the polar jet further to the south during the growing season setting up a boundary zone between warm and cold over the Midwest allowing for mostly adequate rainfall and no persistent heat<sup>1</sup>," wrote Mike Palmerino, Telvent DTN senior ag meteorologist, in a recent post at [dtnpressivefarmer.com](http://dtnpressivefarmer.com). He went on to explain that the strong blocking this winter pushed the polar vortex, normally restricted to Canada, further south.

What does this mean for planting in 2014? Considering that forecasting blocking in the higher latitudes, which is the biggest factor in predicting weather in the middle latitudes, changes with 7 to 10 days' notice at most, the implications for spring weather are hard to predict. However, if the current blocking pattern continues, wet conditions could be expected to set in over much of the Midwest and the Plains, with some exceptions.<sup>2</sup>

### Cold and snow cause wet spots, cool soil temps

Even before spring rains, for areas that saw large amounts of snow this winter, the spring thaw may result in excess moisture, leaving wet spots in your fields that could lead to ruts. In areas with little residue cover where the subsoil remains frozen but the surface is thawing, rills may develop. In addition to these soil texture concerns, the cold temperatures may lead to a longer wait for soil to warm.

First and foremost, take preventative actions by doing some pre-plant field scouting. Be aware of areas in your field that are traditionally problem wet spots and keep an eye on field conditions before you even pull out the planter.<sup>3</sup>

A solution to wet, cold soil is a vertical tillage tool, which can facilitate soil warm-up in addition to helping



The 2940 Air Adjust Residue Manager conveniently adjusts planter attachments from the cab. Push the up button to raise for wet spots or waterways. Pictured is the In-Cab Controller.



Vertical tillage tools like the [Yetter Vertical Tillage Attachment](#) can allow you to start planting sooner by facilitating soil warm-up.

incorporate manure and other fertilizers. Vertical tillage fluffs the residue and opens slots for air to dry and warm the soil, allowing you to get out in the field and plant faster.

### Monitor the weather for better results

While you are waiting to plant it may be worth rethinking your weather monitoring source or service. If you are looking for fresh insights beyond the local news, the following sources are available:

- Your state climatologist's website – Visit [www.stateclimate.org](http://www.stateclimate.org) and choose your state from the map.
- Consulting companies.
- National Weather Service – Visit [www.weather.gov](http://www.weather.gov) for detailed maps and weather reports.

### Facts worth repeating about planting in cooler springs

While it is tempting to enter the field early and plant, it's best to use the extra days to plan how you will effectively plant when conditions are acceptable. "The likely delay in the start of field work this year may mean re-prioritizing operations once soils dry out," according to the University of Illinois Department of Crop Sciences.<sup>4</sup>

- Be cautious about making extra passes to fertilize or perform tillage, which are often considered ways to get ahead before soils are fit for planting. Compaction happened last year, and this year's conditions could

also lead to concerns about compressing the soil.

- Planting early in April in marginal conditions that are not expected to improve quickly, especially "mudding in" corn, almost never leads to better stand counts or better yields.

### Long-term management

If you dealt with wet spots all planting season, once spring planting is completed, consider long-term water management options. Land leveling can help prevent wet spots by getting rid of low spots and indentations in the field that allow water to pool. Creating ditches or waterways may help water drain out of the field instead of causing ponding.<sup>5</sup>

Subsurface drainage or tiling can help your soil infiltration and drainage by collecting water through underground tubes or lines that lead to drainage ditches.

### Playing it cool this planting season

Whatever your plan for planting, remember to be patient. Waiting for the right conditions can make all the difference, saving you time and money.

### Endnotes

1 <http://www.dtnprogressivefarmer.com/dtnag/common/link.do;jsessionid=F960027B46A217E35642E5AC1023A42B.agfreejvm2?symbolicName=/ag/blogs/template1&blogHandle=weather&blogEntryId=8a82c0bc43a1ab8d0143d54168d401f9>

2 Ibid.

3 <http://www.epa.gov/oecaagct/ag101/cropdrainage.html>

4 <http://www.farms.com/news/soil-temperatures-and-spring-prospects-74162.aspx>

5 Ibid.

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