

Tisdale and Connaught areas declared an agriculture disaster

BY RORY MACLEAN WITH FILES FROM REGINA LEADERPOST, THE STARPHOENIX JUNE 11, 2010

The rural municipalities of Tisdale and Connaught are declaring the land an “agriculture disaster area” due to the heavy rainfall that has left up to 60 per cent of the crops unseeded.

“It’s just unbelievable,” said Kevin Irving, RM of Tisdale councillor. “Farmers who have been farming for 60, 70 years are saying they’ve never seen anything like this.”

Even if the rain stopped tomorrow, the ground won’t be dry enough to sow before the deadline for crop insurance passes, said Irving

“By the time it dries up enough to go ahead and seed, it will be too late.”

About 40 per cent of Irving’s crop is seeded, but he says about 15 to 20 per cent of it will be written off by crop insurance because it never sprouted — the water drowned it out.

“This is going to have a huge impact on our community,” said Irving. “We don’t have oil resources or mining here so when you take that much revenue from the surrounding communities, it’s going to affect everyone. Everyone in the towns are concerned. They all realize what it’s going to do to the community, right down to the A & W.”

The RMs hope that declaring the land a disaster area will send the message to federal and provincial politicians that the situation is urgent.

“At this point we’re trying to determine how big the loss really is before we lobby the government for however big of a percentage we need.

Saskatchewan Party MLAs, including Premier Brad Wall and Agriculture Minister Bob Bjornrud, will be touring the area on Monday. Prince Albert member of Parliament Randy Hoback will also be there next week.

Heavy rains in June have slowed seeding all across the province.

The latest data, released Thursday by the Ministry of Agriculture, indicates 70 per cent of the crop has been seeded by June 7.

That is well below the five year average, of having 96 per cent of seeding completed by the end of the first week of June.

But at least some progress has been made in the past week compared to the last week in May, when only 59 per cent of the crop had been seeded.

“This is the wettest that most people can remember,” said Grant McLean, a spokesman for the

Ministry of Agriculture.

Records going back to the 1970s suggest that seeding in the province has never been so seriously disrupted, McLean said.

But some old-timers claim there were some comparable wet conditions sometime in the 1950s, McLean added, in a telephone interview.

Many farmers, looking at the wet conditions and at the late date on the calendar, have now decided to give up efforts to seed any further crops this spring, McLean said.

But other farmers may push ahead with seeding for a few more days, McLean said.

The situation prompted Opposition Leader Dwain Lingenfelter to issue a call Thursday for the federal and provincial governments to provide farmers with a \$100 per acre payment on land they were unable to seed because of the wet conditions.

"Estimates are that as much as five million acres of Saskatchewan farmland will go unseeded this year due to excess moisture," Lingenfelter commented, in a news release Thursday.

"This is a financial disaster for farm families and the rural communities and businesses that depend on agriculture," Lingenfelter added.

Bjornerud said the Saskatchewan Crop Insurance program already pays insured farmers \$50 per acre on land that cannot be seeded because of the weather conditions.

Those cheques for farmers will be mailed out as quickly as possible (hopefully by mid-July) Bjornerud said, in a telephone interview.

Those unseeded acreage payments have been topped off in the past, said Bjornerud, who added it's possible that additional payments might be made this year with help from the federal government.

"When you see it first hand, it's really an eye-opener," Bjornerud said, who toured areas hard hit by the wet conditions earlier this week.

Many fields are seriously flooded and will obviously not be ready to be seeded anytime soon. Those conditions have significant repercussions for farmers and for the provincial economy, he said.

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