MB Sunflower Crop Report

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Friday September 19th, 2014

STAGING

Observations over the past week are showing that 65-70% of the sunflower crop has reached the R-9 stage, 15-20% are in R-8 stage and the last 10-15% are at the R-7 stage. Therefore, 20-30% of the sunflower crop is very susceptible to a killing frost.

FROST

Last week's frost saw temperatures dip down to –2°C in some areas for up to two hours and/or –1°C for up to four hours. The effects from this frost have mostly been found on the plant leaves (Figure 1). Visiting sunflowers fields hardest hit by frost (5 days later), there still seems to be a good flow of moisture through the stalk for seed fill. (Figure 2)

Figure 1. R-9 sunflower field hit by frost, showing leaves affected by frost

Figure 2. Cross section of sunflower stock, 5 days following frost.

HARVEST

Now is the time to start thinking about harvest and getting equipment and dryers ready. Below are a few tips and reminders.

Maturity: The sunflower plant is physiologically mature when the back of the head has turned from green to yellow (although stay-green hybrids may stay green longer) and the bracts are turning brown (Stage R-9) about 30 to 45 days after bloom, and seed moisture is about 35%. Generally, when the head turns brown on the back, seeds are usually ready for harvest.

Common threshing mistake: Waiting to harvest and seeds become too dry and shell out. Combine at 14-15% moisture and use air/dry down to under 10% moisture. Waiting too long to harvest can result in excessive field losses. Use of a dryer is also a good way to dry down sunflowers.

Sources: North Dakota State University Extension Service, Kansas State University Extension Service, University of Missouri Extension