

FRIDAY FOCUS

Lack of rain having dire trickle down effect on farms

Dry summer season is going down as one of the worst in recent memory for Peterborough County farmers

BY LANCE ANDERSON

There's an old saying Brian Haass remembers his grandfather saying.

"It will be a drought year when the sun melts the snow."

This old farmer's adage certainly rang true this year as very little rain fell in the spring; starting a drought that has continued this summer causing much havoc on local crops.

"I've never seen it this bad, this early," says Haass, a third-generation crop farmer whose property is located off of Bensfort Road, south of Peterborough.

A tour of his corn crop is proof enough. The arid, cracked dry landscape has stalks of corn growing, but the bases are a yellow brown instead of a vibrant green.

One field looked more like pineapple leaves growing.

"It shouldn't look like pineapple," says Haass as he navigates his 4x4 truck around his back lot corn field.

This field in particular is normally soaked, as much of it is near marshy, swampland. But on this day, the ground was solid, almost like driving on rough concrete as opposed to a muddy farm field.

"We've only had three rains here this year and they've all been under half-an-inch," says Haass.

The extent of the drought's damage won't be fully known until Haass takes out his combine to harvest his crops. He farms some 1,500 acres, mostly corn and soya bean, in and around the Peterborough area. He isn't holding out much hope that his yield will be enough to make his hard work worth it.

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Farmer Brian Haass checks out his wilted corn crop at his farm south of Peterborough. The lack of rain is causing serious problems for both crop and livestock farmers in the Peterborough area. LANCE ANDERSON/THIS WEEK

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Drought conditions racking up extra costs for farmers

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You can see that the ears of corn are much smaller than they should be and his soya bean plants are already aborting their top purple flowers meaning fewer pods will sprout.

Haass likens the low yield to the average person taking a 40 per cent pay cut in their salary.

"How do you think you'd be doing?" he asks.

Although crop insurance will cover some of the shortfall, Haass says farmers will feel the pinch long into winter. He adds it will be especially hard for cattle producers who are already using hay stocks for feed. Usually, cattle are now out to pasture, munching on green grass, but there is no grass to be had.

"If you're not cutting your grass, we're not cutting hay," says Haass.

He adds it will be next to impossible to stretch hay stocks into the winter months because there probably won't be another hay cut this year.

"It's pretty much too late," he says.

This means the cost of hay has skyrocketed to around \$90 for a round bale, up from its \$40 average price.

That will definitely hurt the pockets of cattle farmers, says Larry Jinkerson, president of the Peterborough County Cattlemen's Association.

For Jinkerson, he will only see 25 per cent of the hay crop he'd normally get this year at his farm near Lakefield.

"We are feeding cattle forage now and we won't have enough for winter," he adds. "So now we have to decide to sell off some of our animals or pay the high price for hay."

In his 41 years as a cattle farmer in the Peterborough area, Jinkerson says this summer ranks up there as one of the worst in terms of drought conditions.

"We've seen some dry spells, but since April we've only seen two inches of rain," he adds.

This lack of rain is also having an effect on the amount of water available for livestock to drink.

Rachel Stillman, president of the Peterborough County Federation of Agriculture, says some farmers are bringing in water trucks to fill ponds to give cattle something to drink. Jinkerson says he knows some farmers who are pumping water up from lakes and rivers.

Water shipments are just another expense farmers have to cover, says Stillman.

"We all know there are water issues and in

the back of their (some farmers') heads they are thinking, what are we going to do?" says Stillman.

Last weekend local farmers gathered for the annual Peterborough County Cattlemen's Association barbecue. Jinkerson says much of the talk centred around the dry conditions and challenges facing both crop and livestock farmers.

"It is the talk out there," he adds.

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A dried soya bean flower on Brian Haass' farm south of Peterborough. Normally this time of year, the plant would have purple flowers where more bean pods would sprout.

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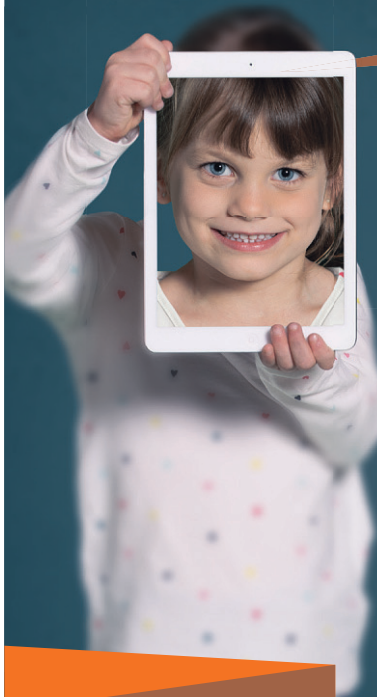
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