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Farmers talk drought at MU field day

By CAMILLE PHILLIPS

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Missouri is in the midst of the worst drought since 1988 – that was the buzz on the MU campus yesterday, as more than 200 farmers and researchers gathered for the annual Pest Management Field Day. Although they came to learn about the latest research on pesticides and herbicides, conversation frequently turned to the bone-dry conditions on Missouri's farms.

On Monday, the U.S. Department of Agriculture reported 60 percent of the corn crop in Missouri to be in poor condition. That's no surprise to Billy Thiel. He farms corn and soybeans in central Missouri.

"The drought's hitting us pretty hard. It's the hardest I've seen it. We're really hurting on corn. We're hoping to catch the rain. Keep beans alive til later in August. We're not gonna have half a crop."

Thiel is also the president of the Missouri Corn Growers Association. He says corn farmers across the state are in about as bad of shape as his farm, with the possible exception of the very northwest corner.

George Topel of Sweet Springs, Missouri echoes Theil's sentiments.

"Corn is really hurting. If we got a lot of rain nearby, we'll still have a crop of corn. And the beans, I'm concerned they'll die before the rain comes here."

Topel was in Columbia to learn about controlling the weeds that have sprung up in his soybeans due to uneven growth. But if the weather doesn't turn soon he won't have much of a crop no matter what spray he uses.

"We don't have any irrigation facilities. So we're just waiting on the good Lord."

On Wednesday, the National Weather Service declared almost all of Missouri to be in a moderate to extreme drought, leaving farmers like Thiel and George Topel with their eyes on the sky, hoping for rain to come in time for them to salvage part of their crop.



http://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/kbia/files/201207/IMG_1803.JPG

Credit Camille Phillips / Harvest Public Media

Irrigation waters a field of soybeans at Bradford Research Center outside Columbia, Mo. on August 12, 2012.

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