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Producers reminded to carefully dry corn during wet harvest

BROOKINGS, S.D. - Steady rains this fall may cause problems for grain producers as harvest is delayed.

That's according to South Dakota State University agricultural and biosystems engineering associate professor Dick Nicolai, who reminds producers to review grain-drying procedures to ensure strong yields.

"The wet weather makes the possibility of a wet harvest season strong, and it poses an interesting challenge to farmers who may have relaxed their guard over the last few years when grain drying was not much of a problem," Nicolai said. "Many producers are considering some type of temporary or short-term storage."

Nicolai said that if drier weather develops, the possibility of corn harvested at safe storage moisture (15 percent or less) exists, but in-field indicators can tell producers to take additional steps.

"If we see stalk lodging or ear drop problems, the harvest timing will be more critical to save the crop, and on-farm drying will need careful consideration," said Nicolai. The basics of drying should be reviewed, just for sake of preparation this season."

Nicolai said yellow-dent corn should be dried until its moisture content is at or below 15 percent before it is placed in long-term storage. Short-term storage of corn with

18-percent moisture content can be safe, but temperature and moisture content will determine how many days it can be kept in this form of storage.

"The cooler and drier the corn, the better," Nicolai said. "The rule for clean grain is that storage time doubles for every 10 degrees Fahrenheit."

Nicolai said corn with 24-percent moisture content, temporarily stored at 60 degrees, only has an allowable storage time of 10 days.

"If you are thinking of natural-air drying in a bin, you have a very brief time to get the job done with that inherently slow process," said Nicolai. "Compared to high-temperature drying, air-only drying can be tricky because of potential spoilage. Producers need to do their homework regardless, because improper drying that leads to spoilage is lost revenue."

Nicolai reminds producers that corn that contains broken kernels, fine material, seeds from weeds or other plants, and moldy kernels will spoil faster.

For more information on grain drying guidelines, ask for SDSU Extension Extra 1014 "Grain Drying Guidelines for a Wet Fall Harvest" at your count Extension office.