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RAIN DELAY



DAN MARSCHKA | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER PHOTOS

Arlin Benner plants rows of corn before it rains on his farm near Mount Joy on Tuesday. Local farmers and produce growers are behind in planting many crops, and damp weather is stunting such crops as corn and soybeans that are already in the ground.

Farmers in Lancaster County stand by as unseasonable period of wet weather risks damage to some plantings, nourishes others



Arlin Benner sits in the cab of his tractor on his farm near Mount Joy.

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The most eager watchers of weather forecasts these days are Lancaster County's farmers.

With at least a trace of rain the last 15 out of 20 days, local farmers and produce growers are behind in planting many crops that are vital to local dairy farms and roadside stands later this summer.

And the uncharacteristically cool and damp weather is stunting such crops as field corn and soybeans that are already in the ground.

"We may end up seeing some replantings," observes Jeff Stoltzfus, a farmer and farm-foods safety educator for Penn State Extension in Lancaster.

"We're a little worried about the strawberry crop with grow rot. We're probably going to see a lot of slug issues with vegetable crops. And the water-melons, cantaloupes and early tomatoes are struggling right now. We're having April conditions in May."

The recent weather has been the antithesis of the dry and sunny conditions strawberries and field corn need to thrive.

"Definitely, the farmers are under pressure," says Deborah Blinn, a former Lancaster County farm Bureau president, who, like the other

WEATHER: LOOKING AHEAD HERE

● **Today:** Partly cloudy with a 55 percent chance of rain; low of 45.

● **Friday:** Mostly sunny during the day; 40 percent chance of rain overnight.

● **Thursday:** Mostly sunny; low of 45.

● **Saturday:** Cooler with a 75 percent chance of rain.

SOURCE: NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE

Crops: Rainy days challenging for fields, greenhouses

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Arlin, plants 700 acres of rye and corn near Mount Joy.

Arlin Benner was cutting his rye cover crop in the headlights of his tractor until 2 a.m. Tuesday, and then was back in the saddle at 4 a.m. to start planting his corn. That is until it started raining again around lunch.

No panic, yet

Despite the delays, no one is panicking yet.

Farmers who have seen this before say the difficult planting season is nothing some sunny skies and drier weather can't fix.

And some are growing produce like rhubarb, asparagus, peas and spin-

ach that actually thrive in the unseasonably damp and cool weather being experienced this spring.

That's why Earl Groff is not complaining. Groff, the third-generation farmer from Bird-in-Hand to run the Groff's Vegetables produce stand in Central Market, grows all those crops.

Sweet corn, the kind you eat, is another that thrives in wet weather, unlike field corn.

In April, Lancaster County farmers and orchardists suffered some damage to the local fruit crop with a series of late killing frosts.

Now, it's the crop growers' turn to sweat.

"Last week, you could get little or nothing done.

But this week guys are dodging the raindrops," says Jeff Graybill, a Penn State Extension agronomy educator in the Lancaster office.

Graybill said he talked with a grain dealer on Saturday who estimated about half of Lancaster County's field corn had been planted.

Ideally, corn should be in the ground by May 15 to May 20, he says. If it's not planted by June 1, it's probably not worth it.

Growers of such forage crops as rye and alfalfa are in a bad spot because they were recently mowed, and if they don't dry out, they are at risk of mold and diseases.

And if the silage doesn't dry properly before being stored, its quality is compromised and cows won't get as



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Arlin Benner plants corn Tuesday before it rains on his farm near Mount Joy.

much energy and fiber, Graybill noted.

Even greenhouse growers have not been spared with so much

cloudy weather.

Those growing facilities can control the moisture and temperature of the plants inside.

But they can't control the lack of sunlight, which makes them more susceptible to disease problems, Stoltzfus says.

THE DOOFING