

OATS NOT PERFORMING AS EXPECTED

For the past couple of weeks, I've been bombarded with questions about why oats is short and heading out early. I'm still looking for the answer.

Oats is becoming more and more popular as an inexpensive, reliable forage crop. It tends to thrive during cool, wet springs, which basically describes the weather experienced in this region from mid-April through May. So, with these so-called good conditions, why are oat plants so short this spring and maturing more rapidly than usual?

Producers, seedsmen, and extension educators have noticed this problem across a large area. Research plots on campus in Lincoln are at least 18 inches shorter than last spring and 10 to 14 days ahead of maturity. I've discussed it with several other faculty experts and from these conversations have come several suggestions.

One of the first thoughts was the warm temperatures we all experienced in March and early April. It seemed logical to think that all those heat units might have caused oats to develop abnormally fast. Unfortunately, some oat fields were planted after these warm days had past and were still short. So another idea was needed.

Was it too wet, we asked. Maybe in some fields but there were plenty other fields that didn't have overly wet conditions. Was it too cloudy? That could cause short plants but not early maturity.

How about the cold snaps in early or mid-May? This has a bit more possibility. Still, there was a wide variation of morning lows from the teens or low twenties to other areas getting no colder than the upper thirties.

The bottom line is that we don't know why oats is short and maturing early. We are confident that it is a reaction to the weather, but for now, the exact reason will remain a mystery.

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