

# Soggy fields leave Midwestern farmers with few answers

By SCOTT McFETRIDGE  
Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa — Between the country's trade dispute with China and the seemingly endless storms that have drenched the central U.S., Iowa farmer Robb Ewoldt has had plenty of time to think about whether it's too late to plant this season, how much federal aid he might get if he does or whether to skip it altogether and opt for an insurance payment.

Instead of driving his tractor, he's driving a truck these days to earn a living while wondering how long it will be before he can return to his fields.

"Sometimes I think, what the heck am I doing farming?" he said recently by phone while returning home after hauling a shipment of dry ice to Chicago. "When you owe the bank money, you do some pretty crazy stuff."

Ewoldt is one of thousands of Midwestern farmers facing such decisions as they endure a spring like no other. It started with poor corn and soybean prices falling even further as the U.S. and China imposed new tariffs, and was compounded by torrential rain and flooding that has made planting impossible and killed off crops that were just starting to emerge.

Conscious that the trade dispute was devastating American farmers, President Donald Trump promised \$16 billion in aid —



Jeff Jorgenson looks over a partially flooded field he farms near Shenandoah, Iowa, on Wednesday.



A field is flooded by waters from the Missouri River, in Bellevue, Neb., on Wednesday. Thousands of Midwest farmers are facing poor prices for corn and soybeans, flooding from melting snow and torrential rains that made planting impossible.

an increase over last year's \$11 billion in aid — but the promise has only added to farmers' confusion about

how to approach this strange spring.

That's because details about how much money

farmers would receive won't be released until later, to avoid influencing what crops they decide to plant. While there's a rationale behind keeping the aid details secret, it adds another layer of uncertainty for farmers already guessing about the weather, future crop prices and how much they would get in insurance payments if they don't plant a crop.

"It's a take what you can get and keep moving year," said Todd Hubbs, an agricultural economist at the University of Illinois. "Depending on how the payments and everything break out, each farm is different."

In the 18 states that grow most of the nation's corn, only 58% of the crop had been planted as of last

week — a far cry from the 90% that would ordinarily be planted by that point. In states that grow nearly all of the soybeans, less than half of the normal crop had been planted. Farmers have even taken to Twitter — creating a #noplant19 hashtag — to commiserate and share photos of their swamped fields.

For Jeff Jorgenson, it's an all-consuming question of how much of his roughly 3,000 acres of southwestern Iowa land he can profitably farm. About a quarter of it can't be farmed due to Missouri River flooding, and much of his remaining property has been inundated with rain and water from the neighboring Nishnabotna River.

Navigating muddy roads in his pickup truck this week, he tried to figure out whether it would be worth pumping water off his land or whether that would even be possible. Normally it wouldn't be worth the effort, but with the prospect that the Midwest's miserable weather will reduce the nation's fall harvest, corn and soybean prices have started to rise and planting every acre possible has become more attractive than settling for insurance that would pay roughly half the revenue of a normal crop.

Jorgenson, 44, said it's a puzzle trying to figure out how much land should remain unplanted and eligible for insurance payments, how much should be planted, how much money in federal aid will be available

and whether those funding sources will be enough to cover his operating loan.

"Honestly, 24 hours a day, this is all you can think about," he said.

Since Bob Worth started farming in 1970, this is the first year he's opted not to plant on most of his 2,300 acres near the southwestern Minnesota community of Lake Benton. It was a difficult choice, but one Worth said he felt obligated to make given the ducks that are swimming where his corn and soybeans should be growing.

"I'm not going to try to destroy my ground to get a crop in," he said, noting that planting equipment would rut and compact his land.

Despite insurance payments he will receive, Worth, 66, said he'll need to refinance loans and lose some of the equity has built up on land that has been in his family for generations.

The deadline for not planting and taking an insurance payment without a penalty varies depending on the state and crop, but the decision time has either passed or is approaching. Hubbs, the Illinois economist, said choosing to opt out, especially when prices are rising, is agonizing for farmers but may be the right choice because of the risk of a poor harvest when planting late in soggy ground and the possibility that the farmer won't be able to harvest the crop before the weather turns cold.

# Trump hitting Mexico with 5% tariff in response to migrants

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — In a surprise announcement that could compromise a major trade deal, President Donald Trump announced Thursday that he is slapping a 5% tariff on all Mexican imports to pressure the country to do more to crack down on Central American migrants trying to cross the border.

He said the percentage will gradually increase "until the Illegal Immigration problem is remedied."

Trump made the announcement by tweet after telling reporters earlier Thursday that he was planning "a major statement" that would be his "biggest" so far on the border.



President Donald Trump speaks during the 2019 United States Air Force Academy graduation ceremony on Thursday at the United States Air Force Academy in Colorado.

"On June 10th, the United States will impose a 5% Tariff on all goods coming into our Country from Mexico,

until such time as illegal migrants coming through Mexico, and into our Country, STOP. The Tariff will

gradually increase until the Illegal Immigration problem is remedied," he wrote, "at which time the Tariffs will be removed."

Trump has accused the Mexican government of failing to do enough to crack down on Central American migrants who have been flowing to the U.S. in search of asylum from countries including El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala.

The announcement comes as the administration has been pushing to update the North American Free Trade Agreement.

The White House said Trump would be using the International Emergency Economic Powers Act to implement the tariff.

"If the illegal migration crisis is alleviated through effective actions taken by Mexico, to be determined in our sole discretion and judgment, the Tariffs will be removed," the White House said in a statement.

But if Trump is not satisfied, the 5% figure will increase to 10% on July 1, to 15% on Aug. 1, to 20% on Sept. 1 and to 25% on Oct. 1.

"Tariffs will permanently remain at the 25 percent level unless and until Mexico substantially stops the illegal inflow of aliens coming through its territory," the statement read.

During a visit to Canada on Thursday, Vice President Mike Pence vowed the deal would be passed this year.

Asked by reporters about the new tariff, Pence said that both Mexico and Congress need to do more and that Trump is determined to use his authority to call on them to do so.

Trump had said that he was planning "a major statement on the border" later Thursday or Friday that would be his "biggest statement, so far, on the border."

"This is a big-league statement. But we are going to do something very dramatic on the border, because people are coming into our country — the Democrats will not give us laws," he said as he headed to a commencement speech for 2019 United States Air Force Academy graduates.

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