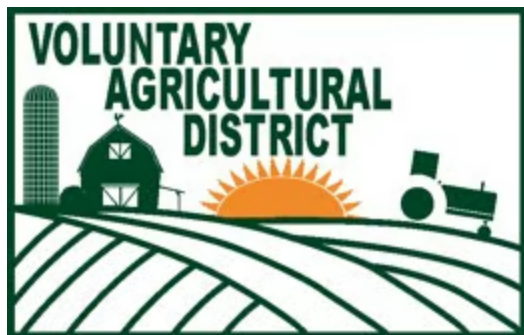


NC Cooperative Extension, Craven Center



Agricultural Update

March 2026, Volume 2

In this Newsletter.....

*Upcoming Events**Current Drought**Using the Corn Climate Dashboard to Reduce Risks**Increasing Production Prices**NC Farm Helpline*

Important Note: Registration deadline for events listed below will vary from as few as 24 hours prior the event to as much as 3-4 days prior the event so please register as much in advance as possible. Also, while attendance is open to anyone, meals, when served, will only be provided for those that register in advance.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Kinston Wheat Field Day - On May 6, 2026, beginning at 9:30am at 2927 Eason Rd., La Grange, NC 28551, NCSU, Harvey's and Grow Pro Genetics will provide a wheat field day to introduce new products, discuss field research, review disease management and provide seed/market updates. Lunch will be provided. Register [HERE](#).

Current Drought

We continue to have upper topsoil that is wet, yet soil moisture deeper in the profile is extremely lacking. For those with water control structures in ditches, it is advised to place boards into these damming systems to capture water as soon after planting as possible. This may make a huge difference for most crops should this drought continue. Regrettably, about half the folks that predict long term climate conditions are suggesting this is precisely what may occur in 2026. Currently, of the 134 years of recording data, 2026 ranks as the 128th most severe drought so far.

For those without the ability to capture water using these riser boards, simply do the best one can do to ensure optimum planting. Under normal circumstances, we would suggest "as early as possible" but given the situation, we may actually need to plant when we have ample soil moisture for seed germination. So, simply aim to plant when we have ample soil moisture in the

upper soil. (Historically, this also means to avoid planting mid-April. See comments below regarding using the Corn Climate Dashboard)

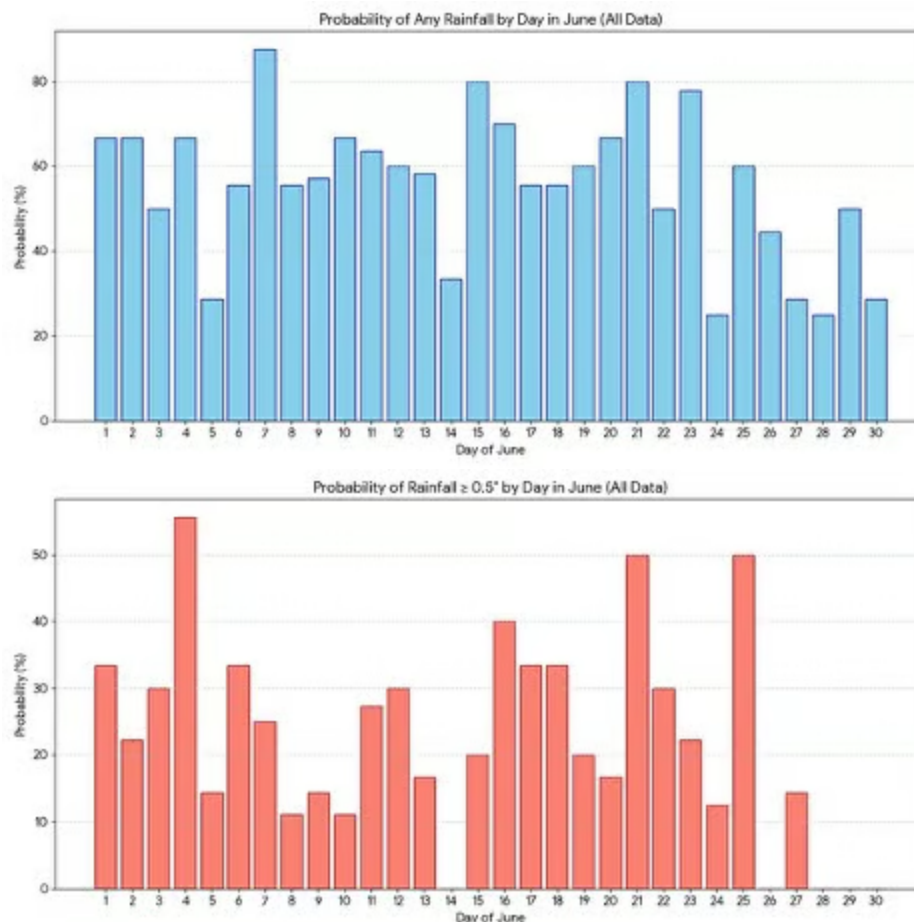
Those that offer these predictions are normally correct for the "average" of the season. However, it also seems that no matter how accurate these prediction are, we always have one "adverse weather event" that changes everything! So, each of you will have to determine what action is best to use as management. We simply offer the information.

Using the Corn Climate Dashboard to Reduce Risk

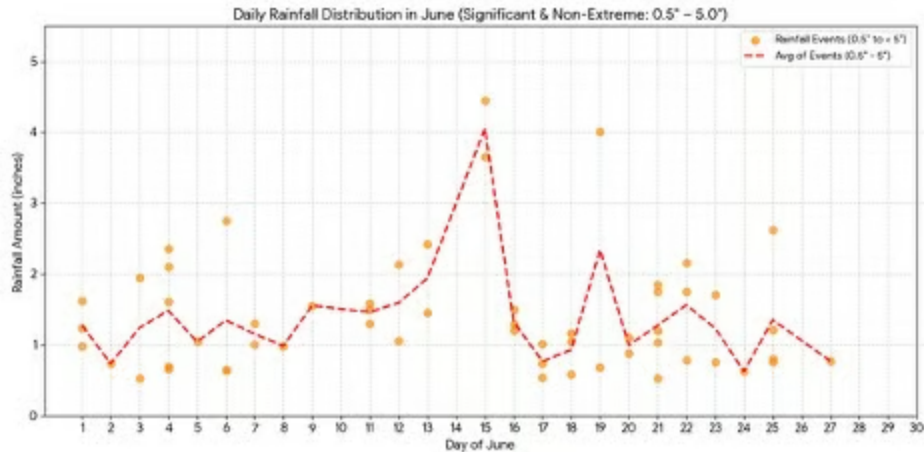
One way to reduce risk of corn failure is either extend pollination days or to avoid pollination stage during periods of drought. There are two ways to do this. The first is to mix hybrids within a field with differing tassel dates. The goal of this effort is to extend the time when pollen is available for pollination during adverse conditions that might otherwise decrease pollination. Generally one would need 7-10 day difference in flowering dates for this to be effective.

The other way to reduce risk is to plant on a date that projects reproductive stages to occur at a time when we typically have the highest rainfall probability. Entering the anticipated planting date into the Climate Corn Dashboard will show expected tassel dates based on historic Growing Degree Days. Use historic weather charts to examine rainfall.

As example, examine the chart below showing the probability of any rainfall amount for the month of June. This chart was generated from Kinston and Newport, NC actual rainfall data from 2013 - 2023. Generally, at about 50% rainfall probability and higher, we have more days likely to have rainfall from June 1st- 15th (12 days) than after June 15th (7 days)



Now break this down to the probability of rainfall 0.5 inch or greater as shown in the graph above. Very early June has the highest probability within the first week of the month and late June (21st-25th) has the most days with a 50% or greater probability of rainfall reaching at least 0.5 inch.



Next, we filtered out the 6+ inch rainfall events to eliminate the bias this has on the average. This graph shows a very high probability of rainfall the first week of June and again beginning about June 20-25th. Each "dot" shows a year of rainfall at the given amount of total rainfall. The peak area in the middle shows two extremely heavy rainfall events.

To best use this data, simply recall what NCSU faculty have emphasized over years. It is best to plant a maturity group and planting date that will ensure corn reproductive stages occur when the greatest probability of rainfall occurs. Using New Bern as a planting site and a planting date of April 1st, the Climate Dashboard for Corn Growers predicts corn tasseling to begin June 15th and should last approximately 10 days. Changing the planting date to April 22nd changes the tasseling date to begin June 24th as the chance of rainfall rapidly decreases. So, in this case, earlier planting is better. Realize that this is historic probability. Anything can, and usually does, happen. However, the data show greater probability of success from earlier planting when possible.

Oddly, July is one of the months we receive the most rainfall. So, delaying planting until May often results in corn tasseling during very frequent periods of rainfall. However, it is also very hot and humid so pollination is indeed less. Having thusly said, usually, this late planted corn yields above average, just never the 200+ bu/ac that we all claim to harvest from earlier planted corn! However, it has historically still been above average corn yield.

Just for the heck of it, we provided the data into Gemini AI and asked about trends and corn planting dates. Here's the result:

Key Findings (2013–2023):

1. **Probability of Any Rainfall:**
 - **June 7th** remains the most consistent day for receiving some amount of rain (nearly a 90% historical probability).
 - **June 15th and 21st** also show high reliability (around 80%).
- **Significant Rainfall (at least 0.5 inch):**
 - **June 4th** is the most reliable day for soaking rain, with a **55% probability** of reaching at least 0.5 inch.

- **June 21st and 25th** are also strong candidates, both showing a **40-50% probability**. These dates are particularly relevant as corn enters critical reproductive stages.
- **Extreme Rainfall (> 3 inches):**
 - **June 15th** has the highest probability (20%) for extreme rainfall
 - Other days that have seen greater than 3 inches of rainfall include **June 2, 3, 10, 12, 16, 19, and 25**.

Summary for Corn Yield:

The main point from NCSU, Extension recommendations....and now AI, is to aim to have corn complete tassel before mid-June if possible. If not possible, then delaying corn planting until very late April or early May, may be a feasible option to ensure corn tassels when we are more likely to receive rainfall. (Typically June 25 - July 4th has little to no rainfall and is very hot!) However, just recall the AI's last statement. It says (or at least to me) that while these are the "trends", it can rain excessively any day of June! So, should you have the ability to plant on an ideal situation, do so.

Increasing Production Prices

As mentioned in the last newsletter, the situation with rising oil prices has also dramatically impacted many agricultural input price increases. Thus, it seems prudent to provide some information regarding nitrogen (N) management for corn.

In spite of what most believe, most plants obtain most of their N needs directly from soil reserves and organic matter decomposition. Corn uses a range of 35-55% of the total N we apply. It only needs about 80-90 lbs./ac of actual N above soil levels to produce 180 bu/ac. In other words, 60-80% of the N found in corn at harvest actually was derived from the soil, not the fertilizer we added. (We add fertilizer as a "luxury consumption" nutrient to ensure adequate N levels during climatic drought stress as well as the simple fact that microorganism will consume the N first. What is "left" by microbes is used by plants. We also add more than required to replace what the anticipated crop harvest will remove). These facts are critical to understand because it is the basis for the following discussion. (It also assumes one is NOT planting corn on very coarse sandy soils unsuitable for corn production).

NC State University corn budgets assume a starter fertilizer to apply 20-40 lbs./ac of actual N, and phosphorus, if phosphorous is needed. The remaining N is applied at or near layby with a total of 140-150 lbs./ac of N applied for the year. This is important to realize as you plan your specific budget. If you exceed this nitrogen rate, either from starter use or applied at layby, this will also increase your cost. Current prices have been recently increased for N within budgets (originally prices were \$0.22/lb.) creating an even smaller profit per acre. As such, reducing N to a reasonable rate has tremendous value in 2026.

Keep in mind that we are not suggesting to apply N at rates too low to obtain good yield. Quite the opposite. We have two years of data within the area with various growers showing that about 150 lbs./ac of N will consistently provide 180-200 bu/ac corn yield. So, we suggest that one aim for a "reasonable" yield given the extremely tight economic projection of virtually no profit rather than aiming for unrealistic yield.

Put another way, using the increase of fertilizer prices, the current "moderate" (140 bu/ac yield) corn budget projects breakeven yield at 151 bu/ac sold at \$5.23 when planting 28,000 seeds/ac, using about 15 GPA starter, and applying 150 lbs./ac of N. This does not include any land rental. Let's be honest, the county of Craven has never averaged corn yield this high. Individual farms may indeed yield this much but we have never averaged this countywide. It is not likely in 2026. As such, make sure you do not spend excessive amount on unwarranted inputs. Nitrogen can be one of those inputs. Anything that is not making you profit, is unwarranted and is costing you money.



NC Farm Help Line

Tariffs, low economic prices, unpredictable weather, age, labor problems, and many other factors contribute to stress of farming. In fact, whether we like it or not, agriculture has one of , if not the highest, accidental death rates due to equipment use, as well as the highest suicide rate for occupations. Do consider potential impact of things that can be a negative influence on production but please don't worry about things you cannot change! If you find yourself depressed, well, we can listen! If you are not comfortable discussing issues with us, help is available 24/7, through the Help Line that connects individuals experiencing a crisis or in need of other help with resources including mental health, financial, legal, farm safety/health, Cooperative Extension and more at 844-325-3276 or online at <https://ncfarmstress.org/crisis-and-resource-lines/>. Additionally, for tobacco producers, legal or labor assistance is available free from [GAP Connections](#)

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633-1477 or email: mike_carroll@ncsu.edu. Requests can be served more effectively if notice is provided at least 10 days before the event.

Español

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<https://www.usda.gov/oascr/program-complaints>

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