

Media Release

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Assessing Your Winter Wheat this Spring

Recent cold weather reinforces the importance of checking your fall seeded crops.

Edmonton, AB – With the recent turn in weather conditions, producers are reminded to take the time to carefully assess their winter wheat crops this spring.

While the recent cold spell and accompanying snowfall might have been inconvenient for some, it does offer some benefits to fall seeded crops. The snow that covered many parts of Alberta means that winter wheat will have good moisture to resume growing this spring. The blanket of snow will also help protect the crop from colder temperatures. Since frozen soils warm quite slowly in the spring, several weeks of warm air temperatures are required to completely de-harden winter wheat plants that have survived the winter without damage.

Recent colder temperatures do mean that more leaf tip damage may be visible. However, browned, dried leaves are not necessarily an indication of winter kill. Producers should also examine the plant roots to determine crop health and survival. “Digging up plants and inspecting the crown tissue for white colour and perhaps some new white root growth is the surest sign of survival after winter,” offers Melissa Stanford, conservation program specialist with Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC). Plants can be dug up and placed in a plastic bag to watch crown colour over a couple of hours. If the crown turns black, the plant is likely dead, but if it stays white for more than a few hours, the plant has survived.

Fall seeded crops do need sufficient time to recover after the winter or a cold weather event. As a general rule, wait until most other spring seeding is completed before deciding the fate of a winter wheat crop. Most likely, it will look considerably different than it did a few weeks prior. “Don’t be too hasty to plow under or spray out your winter wheat crop,” advises Stanford.

Ideally, winter wheat crops have a minimum plant stand of 18-23 plants per square foot. Although, as few as 10-12 plants per square foot can be adequate because of winter wheat’s competitive nature, however low plant counts will require more intensive management.

Seeding winter wheat early in the fall and seeding into standing stubble sets the crop up for a strong start prior to the onset of winter conditions.

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