



When weeds begin to come through small grain, harvesting efficiency takes a nose dive. Careful studies of losses of combining weedy grain compared to clean grain show that you will lose almost 10% more of the crop. For example, if you have a 30-bushel-per-acre yield of wheat and it's clean, chances are you will be able to put almost 20 bushels in the combine bin. If the crop is weedy you'll be lucky to get 25 bushels out of the weeds and into the bin. Combining early you get ahead of weed growth.

## EARLY HARVEST of SMALL GRAIN

*can increase yields  
and improve quality*

Each year as small grain harvest time approaches, most farmers begin watching the weather with increasing concern. One bad storm when wheat, oats or barley is ready to combine can often cut yields 50% or more. While this rarely happens, an untimely shower or delay because of machinery breakdown allows weeds to "gain" on the crop and combining becomes difficult.

Actually "green-stuff" turns into a vicious circle. A rain delays harvest and the weeds grow more. Green weeds then, in turn, increase moisture content of combined grain.

Careful studies by colleges have shown that the process of combining adds 5% more moisture to oats or barley if the crop is heavily weed-infested. Weedy wheat will not show as noticeable an increase in moisture. You can usually figure about 2% more moisture in the grain after combining.

Early harvest, before the grain crop becomes dead ripe, is becoming more practical. Many farmers have purchased "batch" grain driers or have installed grain bins equipped with fans. In most cases this equipment was purchased primarily for corn. But that doesn't mean it can't be used during small grain harvest too.

Wheat can be safely harvested at 18% to 20% grain moisture with no harmful effect on its quality. It must, of course, be dried down to safe moisture content for storage or sale. Oats also can be combined when they reach a moisture content of from 18% to 20%. Studies at several colleges throughout the Midwest have shown that these are safe, practical levels to begin combining if drying equipment is available.

Most modern combines can be adjusted to do an excellent job when harvesting high moisture small grain. Power requirements will be somewhat higher though. Sometimes farmers who have attempted harvesting small grain with small combines equipped with an engine find the combine is underpowered. This will rarely happen with the larger units or when the combine is a power take-off model and a large tractor is available.

Major adjustment changes for combining 20% moisture small grain are limited to the cylinder. You may have to narrow the concave-cylinder clearance more than for normal small grain combining. In addition, the speed of the cylinder may need to be somewhat faster. However, in no case will the grain be damaged enough by the cylinder to lower its grade if you are careful.

The straw racks, sieves and cleaning fan actually will perform slightly more efficiently when the grain ranges from 15% to 20% in moisture than when drier, providing there's no surface moisture such as dew on the grain. No specific changes are required compared to normal combining adjustments.

Approximately one more bushel per acre of grain will be saved on the average from early combining. However, in some years it may be as much as ten bushels. Most researchers feel that from \$1 to \$10 higher return per acre is possible from early harvest. In addition, you have the opportunity to take advantage of the government support program every year. This may not be possible where you do not have drying equipment since in some years you simply can't wait after the grain reaches 14% moisture.

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