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Harvest is your “Report Card”

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It used to be that you got your report card in June, at the end of the school year, and unless it showed a failing grade, it was just filed away without paying too much attention to it. The timing has changed, in that now the report card comes at harvest time and reflects your cropping program.

Paying some attention to what the report card says, can show you where you can make more money next year.

The first thing we look at, obviously, is the overall yield average – kind of like looking at the average mark on the bottom of the report card. How does it compare with other years? If it is up or down, can you account for this with the weather over the growing season? Is it moving the same direction as yields in the rest of the neighbourhood? (You didn't worry too much if your average mark was down because you happened to have a tough teacher, and everybody's mark was down.)

The unexpected changes should prompt you to dig deeper to find the reasons.

The next place to look is at the consistency of crop yields, and whether any patterns emerge. (“Hey, I aced shop and phys ed, but my algebra mark stinks...”) Did some fields do better than others? Are there areas within fields that did exceptionally well, or poorly? Are there yield differences that follow changes in topography, or soil type? This information, along with data collected as you scouted fields during the growing season, can start to pull together a picture of what actually happened in your fields.

Some explanations will be obvious, like weed escapes or delayed weed control.

Others will require some detective work, like localized compaction or nutrient deficiencies. You should be prepared to do some digging, literally, to look at the crop roots if you suspect soil conditions have contributed

poor yields. Collect soil samples for analysis from poor areas as well, to check whether lime or fertilizer is needed.

Once you have identified the most likely causes of yield limitations, you can begin to plan the best way to overcome these limitations. This might mean taking action right now, like control of perennial weeds or adding extra tile to deal with excess soil moisture. It may mean changes to next year's program, like adjustments to the control programs for annual weeds, changes to the fertilizer program, or planter maintenance to get better planting depth. Finally, the solution could be some longer term changes like adding forages into the rotation to increase soil organic matter levels and improve soil structure.

The only thing that is certain is that if you file away this report card without paying too much attention to it, you will be losing a chance to grow better crops next year.



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There are over 500 Certified Crop Advisers (CCA) in Ontario. Each CCA has demonstrated their knowledge about Ontario crop production by passing the required exams. In addition, they have the crop advisory experience, the education, the commitment to continuing education and have signed a comprehensive code of ethics, which places the grower's interests first.

This industry driven program helps ensure that Ontario crop producers are well served by those providing their crop production advice. This article was written by one of those CCA's.