



## Timing Soybean Harvest

**Soybeans should be delivered to elevators with a moisture content of 13%. Harvest should begin when grain moisture content reaches 14 to 15%. Losses can be kept to a minimum with proper harvest equipment maintenance and operation.**

### Soybean Moisture Monitoring

As soybeans begin to dry down, growers should monitor crop moisture levels and begin to think about soybean harvest order. A common rule of thumb is that elevators prefer soybeans with moisture content at or below 13% moisture. It is in the grower's best interest to keep the crop they deliver as close to that number as possible, to avoid the loss of potential profit that can occur with variances above or below 13%.

Soybeans delivered at a moisture content above 13% are assigned a penalty that is shown directly on the scale ticket. Soybeans testing under 13% moisture will be accepted by the buyer; however, the grower will lose profit potential for the reduced moisture content. For example, a standard 60 pound bushel contains 87% dry matter and 13% moisture, or 52.2 lbs. dry matter and 7.8 lbs. moisture. If the moisture content drops to 11%, the dry matter weight per bushel increases to 89% or 58.65 lbs. For each 52.2 lbs. of dry matter sold at 11% moisture, the seller loses an opportunity to sell 1.35 lbs. of water per bushel. Buyers assume each bushel of soybeans delivered for sale weighs 60 lbs. and is at 13% moisture.

### Harvest Decisions

Harvest should begin as soon as the crop reaches a moisture content of 14 to 15%, to help maximize grain weight and minimize yield losses. Soybeans should reach 15% moisture content about 5 to 10 days after 95% of the pods have reached their mature color under good drying conditions. If drying equipment is available, harvest can start at 17 to 18% moisture content. Harvesting as much of the crop as possible before the moisture level drops below 12% will help to reduce splits and cracked seed coats. When mature soybeans undergo multiple wetting and drying cycles, the grain can lose test weight and quality.

When faced with both dry and green soybeans in the same field, growers should consider harvesting at two different times. Time and equipment constraints can make it necessary to harvest the whole field at once. In that case, growers should be aware of field conditions throughout so they make the best harvest-timing decision for the majority of the field.

### Harvest Equipment

More than 75% of soybean harvest losses can be attributed to the gathering unit. While some grain loss is expected during harvest, mechanical losses can be kept to a minimum with proper equipment maintenance and operation. To maintain moisture and reduce shattering losses, growers should avoid harvesting when soybeans are the driest, such as on hot afternoons.

### Grain Storage

Soybeans kept at 13% moisture content, and at temperatures below 60°F, can be stored for at least six months. However, during warmer spring and summer months, moisture content should be reduced to 11%. Foreign materials and fines should be removed with an air screen cleaner to allow more even air flow during drying.

**Sources:** Conley, S. 2017. Harvest considerations for variable soybean maturity. Integrated pest and Crop Management. University of Wisconsin. <http://ipcm.wisc.edu/>; Dorn, T. 2009. Harvest soybeans at 13% moisture. CropWatch. University of Nebraska-Lincoln. <http://cropwatch.unl.edu/>; Soybean production field guide for ND and NWMN. 2010. North Dakota State University Extension. [www.ag.ndsu.edu/](http://www.ag.ndsu.edu/). Web sources verified 8/28/2018.

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