



# AGRONOMY IN ACTION ALERT

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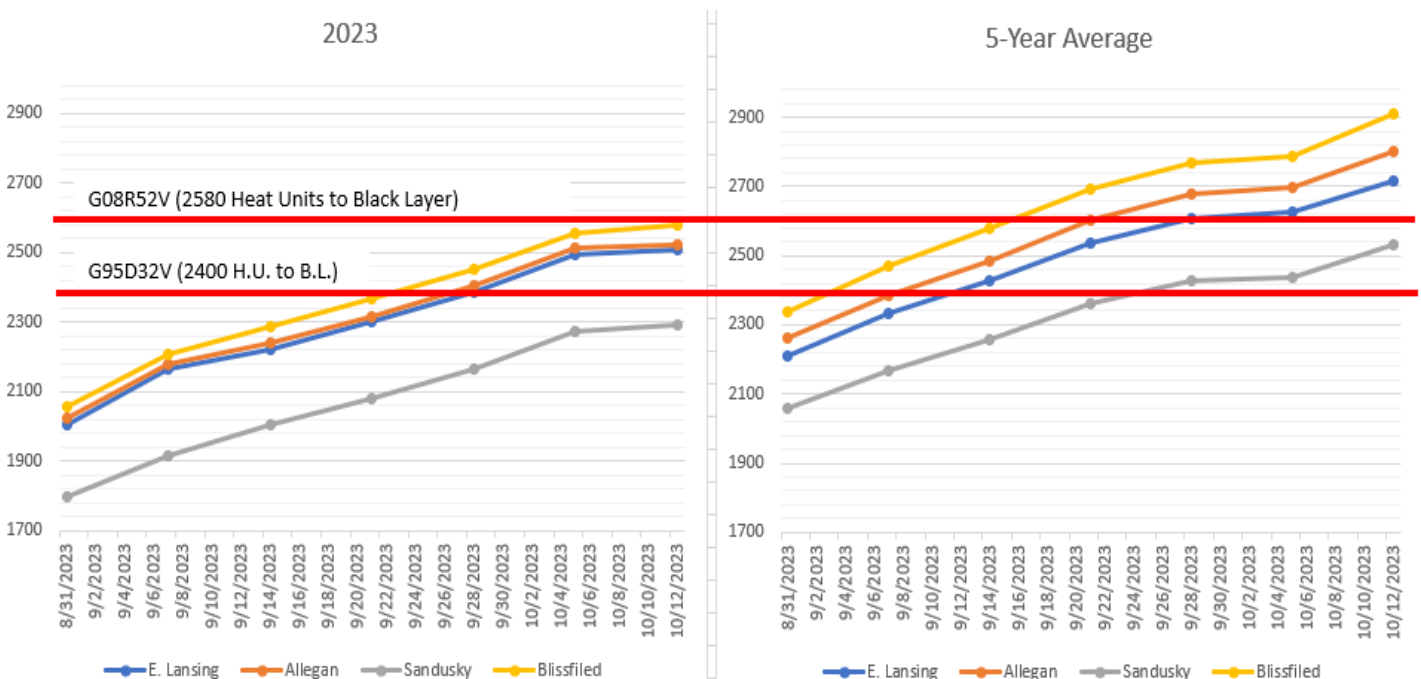
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## What's The Deal With VOM In The Corn This Year?

As I talk with farmers around the state, one of the most common questions has been, "What's the deal with the high levels of VOM in the corn crop this year?" According to an article by Dennis Rudat on November 27, 2023 in the Michigan Farm News, it said, "Following a very tumultuous 2023 growing season of weather extremes, Mother Nature is taking one last jab at Michigan's corn crop as producers struggle to wrap up harvest. Thanks to late-season, above-normal precipitation resulting in outbreaks of Gibberella ear rot (GER), reports of high vomitoxin (VOM) levels are coming in from across the state, according to Robert Geers, vice president of merchandising for Michigan Agricultural Commodities (MAC). "I would argue it's probably some of the highest levels we've ever seen," said Geers." (full article can be read at: <https://www.michiganfarmnews.com/vom-levels-in-corn-some-of-the-highest-we-ve-ever-seen->) Though levels on the west side of Michigan seem to have remained low, the remainder of the state has reported issues high enough to get docked at the elevator.

Like any disease, the cause includes all three sides of the disease triangle: susceptible host (corn), presence of the disease (Gibberella ear rot), and a suitable climate (wet fall). In 2023, many areas of the state had all three, resulting in our current situation. The other thing that made it even worse is that there was a lot of corn this year that was killed by frost prior to achieving black layer (prior to 32% moisture) and therefore the corn did not mature correctly. This immature, dead corn showed up in our fields as; hard to harvest, lower test weight, slower to tip down its ears, and therefore more moisture held in the ear – resulting in even higher VOM levels in that corn.

So, why did we have so much corn that didn't mature prior to the first frost? The answer is in the numbers – primarily the number of heat units accumulated by the growing crop prior to frost. Take a look at these graphs:



Notice that in the left chart labeled “2023” that it takes G08R52V a total of 2580 heat units to hit black layer and 2400 heat units for G95D32V to hit black layer. Each colored, angled line is a different county’s data. Note that only Blissfield, MI (far SE MI) even got close to 2580hu accumulation this year, and the other counties were way below that level. In comparison, look at the right-hand chart of the “5 Year Average” heat unit accumulation where everywhere but Sandusky (up in the thumb) easily achieved 2580hu prior to a killing frost.



Most years, we could have gotten away with planting a 108 day hybrid even in mid-Michigan, but this year, we just didn’t get the heat units to get full season hybrids mature. In fact, there were many farmers in Michigan that planted in late May, and due to the early season drought, had hybrids not emerge until they got a rain almost a month later. Those hybrids didn’t take advantage of any accumulated heat units in May or most of June – compounding the problem of accumulating heat units prior to frost. With this in mind, you can quickly see why so many Michigan farmers are dealing with VOM, lower test weight, and harvest issues this year.

As for next year, what can we expect? The good news is that the 2024 season is bound to be different. Many farmers will jump to earlier maturing hybrids to avoid the challenges of 2023. The problem is that basing next year on last year is like betting the last winning number on roulette in Las Vegas for the next spin. The likelihood of next year being the same as this year is low. Therefore, let’s plan for success. Let’s select a package of hybrids that are proven to work on your soils and with your management in a maturity that is appropriate for your growing region and then work to get them planted uniformly deep in a soil that is ready to accept seed. These rules never change.

If you want to discuss this further, feel free to call me or your Golden Harvest Sales Rep or Seed Advisor. We look forward to working with you again in 2024.

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