Harvesting, Handling, and Storage of Seed


Because sunflower (Helianthus annuus L.) has not been considered a major crop in the USA, equipment designed primarily for other crops has been adapted for sunflower production. Much of this equipment originally was used for corn (Zea mays L.) and soybeans (Glycine max (L.) Merr.). The drying systems, storage structures, etc., and other equipment for these crops has been very successful. Their adaptation, however, has met with variable success because sunflower is quite different physically and morphologically from corn and soybeans. As a result, some equipment is overdesigned for sunflower; for example, storage structures can support larger volumes of sunflower seed than corn or soybeans. Special precautions must be taken by sunflower producers in adapting some equipment, such as crop dryers. Significant modifications also have been necessary in harvesting equipment to facilitate efficient harvesting of sunflower seed.

HARVESTING SUNFLOWER SEED

Sunflower planted in May in the northern production areas of North America usually is ready for harvest in late September or October, a growing season of approximately 120 days. The growing season may vary in length depending upon the summer temperatures during the growing season, relative moisture, and fertility. Sunflower plants are physiologically mature when the back of the head has turned from green to yellow, a change that usually takes place before the heads are dry enough to harvest. In northern regions of North America the sunflower plant frequently is desiccated after a killing frost. If this killing frost occurs before the backs of the heads turn yellow, yield losses will result.


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