

# Catastrophic Storm Alters Harvest

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September is generally the time in Jefferson County when many of the high value seed crops begin to be harvested. However with the dramatic and devastating storm that swept through the area a week ago farmers' harvest season has been significantly altered. Farmers and seed companies are now working on picking up the pieces from the storm and figuring out how to move forward from this catastrophic loss that happened to many of the fields.

Central Oregon is the primary US hybrid carrot seed production area, supplying seed to the domestic fresh market carrot industry. Approximately 85% of the hybrid carrot seed planted in the United States is grown in Jefferson and adjoining counties. Carrot seed harvest generally begins in September. Harvesting carrots can be a challenge because of the three different umbel orders. An umbel is a group of tiny clustered flowers where the seed is produced. The primary/king umbel matures first, followed by the secondary umbel, then tertiary umbel. Carrot fields are swathed when the primary and secondary umbels have browned but before the tertiary umbels have matured. The swathed rows are then dried for 3-10 days before they are run through a combine, where the seed is thrashed from the umbels. Many of the carrot fields hit were just weeks away from being harvested but now some farmers may not be able to salvage any seed from their fields. The intense rain and hail beat the carrot stalks to the ground and shattered seed from the umbels, leaving rows of barren stalks in the field. Not only does this pose a problem to farmers but also to the seed company and the companies they are contracted with. Since 85% percent of the world's carrot seed is grown in Jefferson County, this loss affects more than just Jefferson County farmers. In 2012, over 4300 acres of carrot seed was grown in Central Oregon, grossing \$18,363,384, this year those figures will be much lower.

Other specialty seed fields like onions, radish, dill and alfalfa were affected by the storm. All specialty seed fields are very time sensitive with their harvest and

Besides seed crops, farmers also faced a loss with some of their alfalfa fields. Farmers can generally get four cuttings of hay off of their crop per year. Before the storm hit farmers were working on their third cutting of hay. The wind and hail blew so strong across alfalfa fields that the leaves were blown off the stalks, leaving just stems in some fields. For the badly damaged fields farmers plan to mow and rake the remaining stems and sell the hay for a low price, since the quality is significantly lower from the leaves being gone. Farmers with marginally damaged fields from the storm will try to re-irrigate and then take another cutting.

The storm not only brought forth problems with current fields but also with fields that had just been planted. Many fields for the upcoming year have to be in the ground by August in order to have proper time to germinate and grow before winter hits. Along with the wind and hail, also can significant rain fall and flooding. Fields that had recently been planted became flooded with storm water and overflow from canals and ditches. Farmers will have to wait and see within the next couple weeks if any damage was posed to their newly planted crops.

For more information on crops, harvest and where these fields are located please visit the Jefferson County Seed Council website ([www.jeffcoseed.com](http://www.jeffcoseed.com)) or contact the Central Oregon Agricultural Research Center at 541.475.7107.