Farm Adaptation Innovator Program
Impacts of Tile Drain Cleaning Over One year in Delta, British Columbia

Katie Neufeld¹, Siddhartho Paul², Sean Smukler³

Background
Periodic inspection and maintenance is recommended to keep drain tiles functioning in the long-term. Well-functioning drain tiles may be an important tool to help farmers to adapt to climate change. When performance is reduced, cleaning of tiles by flushing may be an effective way to remove sediment or iron ochre buildups, thereby restoring effectiveness and extending their lifespan. Best carried out in the fall or spring, when water levels are adequate in ditches for pumping and no activity is occurring on the field, drain cleaning can range in cost from $50/acre (at 60 ft spacing) to $200/acre (at 15 ft spacing). While tile cleaning may be a recommended practice, in a recent survey of farmers in Delta, BC, it was clear that they were uncertain about the actual benefits. To address this uncertainty a research project was initiated to evaluate the efficacy of tile drainage cleaning in blueberry and vegetable crop fields across Delta, British Columbia. Tiles were cleaned in a section of 10 fields in the winter/spring of 2016/2017 and the cleaned/un-cleaned monitored for 1-1.5 years.

Geographic Applicability
This study was conducted in Delta; findings should be applied only to locations with humid maritime climate and poorly drained, silty soils

Commodity Relevance
This study was conducted on blueberry and vegetable crop fields but findings may also be applied to other crops

Time Frame
Fall 2015 - Spring 2017

Study Objectives
- Investigate tile cleaning effectiveness in terms of water table depth in blueberry fields, and soil moisture soil and workability in vegetable crop fields.
- Calculate the number of extra workable days gained by cleaning tile drains
- Evaluate the impact of tile cleaning on soil salinity

¹ Research Coordinator, Faculty of Land and Food Systems, University of British Columbia, Vancouver
² PhD Student, UBC
³ Assistant Professor, UBC
Results

- Tile cleaning lowered the water table in blueberries by 13% (marginally statistically significant, p=0.06) between November 2016 and June 2017 (Fig 1).
- In vegetable crop fields, the data showed a trend of lower soil moisture in the spring immediately following cleaning (Fig 2). In the fall of 2016 and spring of 2017, which was unusually wet, this trend was no longer evident. Differences in soil moisture were not statistically different.
- Tile Cleaning had no statistically significant impact on the total number of workable days calculated for the production season between the spring and fall of 2016. The data however showed a trend that Cleaned fields had more (187 ± 12) workable days than Not Cleaned (175 ± 7) (Fig 3).
- Based on these differences, twelve extra workable days per year would be gained at a cleaning cost of $10/additional workable day/acre.
- The clearest effect was in the spring of 2016, immediately after cleaning.
- Drain cleaning did not reduce salinity after one year.

For more information:
For more details on the results of this project visit the Climate Action Initiative website:
http://www.bcagclimateaction.ca/faip-project/fi13/
and the Sustainable Agricultural Landscapes Lab website:
http://sal-lab.landfood.ubc.ca/projects/delta-drainage-project/
For more information on drainage management visit the BC Ministry of Agricultures website:
http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/industry/agriculture-seafood/agricultural-land-and-environment/water/drainage

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