

## STUBBLE HEIGHT



I have long been a proponent of leaving more stubble standing at harvest, feeling that it better protects the soil from wind erosion and provides the opportunity to build soil moisture through snow trapping. When I bring this up to producers, I am often met with a shrug. Many growers are lukewarm to the concept, often expressing the view that there is not enough moisture in the winter snows to compensate for the additional hassle the taller stubble may cause at seeding time.

I find this attitude a little puzzling. We go to great lengths to provide our crop with the proper nutrition and crop protection products, and many producers also show a willingness to spend money on things like humic acid and other biologicals to reduce stress and hopefully increase yields. Yet we farm in a part of the world where 7 years out of 10, moisture is the variable that puts a cap on our production. Every inch of soil moisture we can accumulate and preserve amounts to about an extra 5 bushels of canola or an extra 7 to 8 bushels of wheat produced, so I have always been surprised by the low priority many place on snow trapping. However, I had never seen any studies on the subject that backed up my feeling that leaving even slightly taller stubble was worthwhile.

So it was with great interest I saw an article in the July 12th Grainews detailing a field scale trial that had been done in central Saskatchewan looking at the impact of stubble height on yield. They found a very definitive correlation between the stubble height left at harvest and the moisture available at seeding time the next spring. While the  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an inch of extra soil moisture they recorded at seeding does not sound like much, it can make all the difference in the world in a dry spring. These trials involved the use of a stripper header (which many of our seeding systems don't accommodate), but it did show that snow trapping positively impacts spring seedbed moisture and final yield of the crop. So in an environment where we are constantly striving for every little advantage that may squeeze a little more revenue from the field, adding a couple of inches to the stubble height at harvest is an easy to adapt management practice that will pay off more years than not. If you would like to see the full details on the trial, and the conclusions of the author, check out the link below.

<https://www.grainews.ca/features/stubble-height-can-make-yield-difference/>



*A drone image, taken by Dr. Philip Harder, then with the University of Saskatchewan's Centre for Hydrology, shows the test field in February 2023 with different amounts of snow trapped by different stubble heights.*

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