

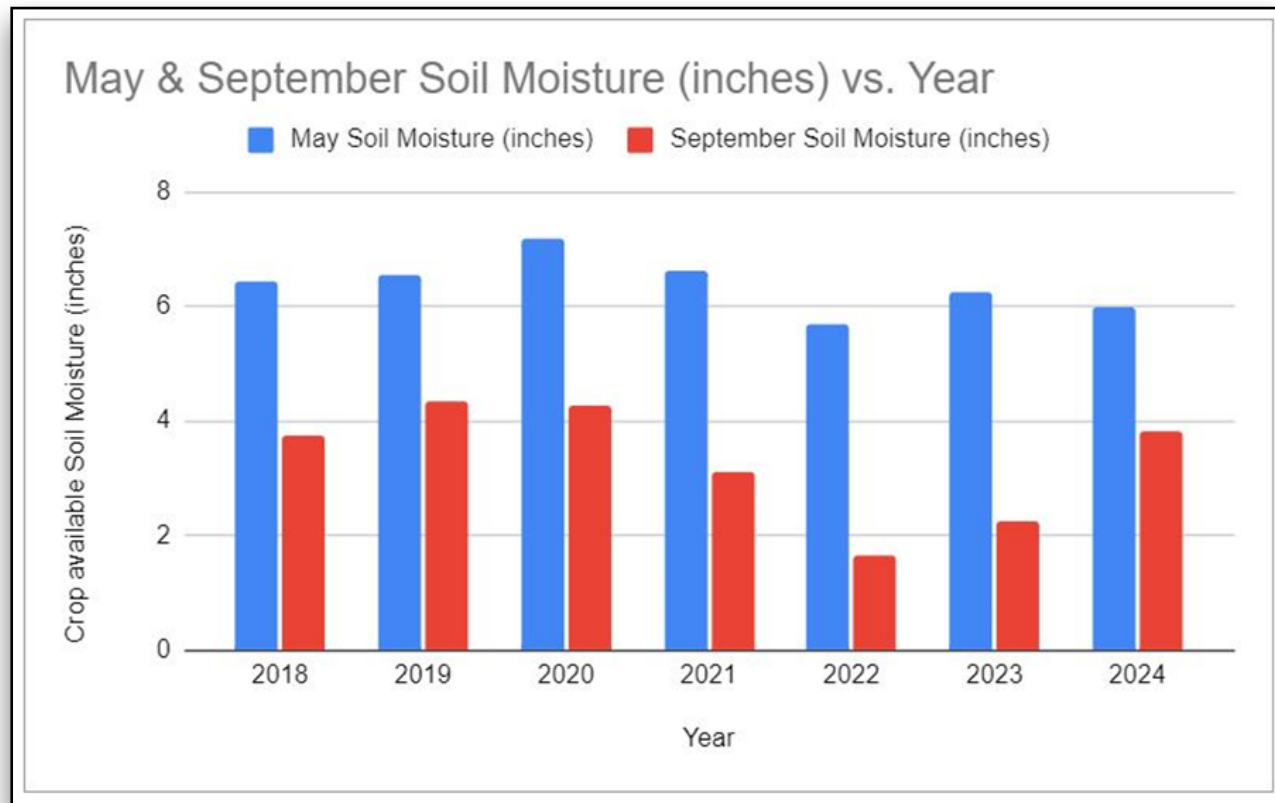
Looking for Silver Linings

As we slog through this harvest of disappointing yields and sagging commodity markets, I sometimes find myself thinking of my father. He cut his farming teeth in the depths of the Great Depression and farmed through back to back to back crop failures during the “dirty thirties”, losing half the family farm in the process. Yet he remained the eternal optimist throughout his life; sure that the magical combination of bumper crops and surging commodity prices lay just around the corner. He once told me that every farmer of his generation knew that they could count on having two good years on the farm - 1946 and next year. It was a joke that held more than a kernel of truth in it. Well farming practices, the equipment in the field, and the monetary stakes involved in the game may have changed drastically since my father retired in 1973, but I don’t believe farmers’ attitudes are any different that they have ever been.



So with that in mind, I started looking towards next year's cropping season and searching for reasons for optimism. And I found one in our soil moisture situation. Through our association with the Crop Intelligence people, Battle River Implements has soil moisture probe data dating back seven years in some fields. Soil moisture is the engine that drives yield potential in our semi-arid climate. It is like money in the bank, as every inch of soil moisture is an inch we don't have to depend on in-season rains for. And those soil reserves have been on an alarming trend over the past several years.

As you can see by this chart, post-harvest soil moisture reserves (the orange bar) have been less than ideal for much of this decade so far, even dropping below 2 inches in the top 100 cm in 2022. According to some experts, it requires about 4 inches of crop available moisture just to ensure proper germination and establishment in our climate. The yield potential (excluding agronomic factors such as fertility and soil type) is established by water available above and beyond those 4 inches.



So it is encouraging to see we are headed into this fall with the best soil moisture reserves we have seen since 2020. If we can somehow manage to approach our 30 year average of around 3.4 inches of precipitation between November 1 and April 30, we could go in to 2025 with some of the best starting soil moisture that we have seen since we started monitoring levels in 2018. As we saw this year when extreme heat hit at the critical reproductive stage of most crops, moisture alone doesn't guarantee a good yield. But moisture remains the most common limiting factor in Prairie crop production. Good starting soil moisture in 2025 also doesn't ensure summer rains, but it should mean good crop germination and emergence – and that's half the battle in setting a good yield potential.

Wayne Spurrill
P. AG

Agronomist



Camrose Store: (780) 672-4463
Cell: (780) 679-8225
email: wspurrill@briltd.com

www.briltd.com
Toll Free: (877) 913-3373

Camrose • Killam • Provost • Wainwright