

"We were wiped out in a matter of minutes. We've farmed for many, many years and never seen anything like it. It's a sad day."

— Nora Sittig, who farms northeast of Renner

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Farmers tally losses as crops reduced to mush

Positive season turns bleak after Sunday hail storm

By RANDY HASCALL
Argus Leader Staff

Nora Sittig took a moment Monday to reflect on what could have been.

"We had some pretty great looking fields of corn," she said. "We had just been talking about how one more rain would really make the corn."

Instead, the precipitation came Sunday in the form of hail nearly the size of baseballs. Days after admiring the crops on their farm six miles northeast of Renner, Nora and Scott Sittig were busy conferring with federal crop-insurance officials.

"We were wiped out in a matter of minutes," she said. "We've farmed for many, many years and never seen anything like it. It's a sad day."

A dozen reports of hail damage were filed Monday at Dakota Insurance Agency in Baltic.

"We'll get calls all week, I imagine," Juanita Guischer of the agency said.

The phone also was ringing at the Farm Bureau office in Sioux Falls. One of several stops by an insurance adjuster was at the Bob Ollerich farm 1½ miles southwest of the EROS Data Center, where hail damaged about 240 acres of crops, mostly corn.

"It was an awful beautiful crop, just outstanding," Ollerich said. "I've lived here 30 years and never seen a mess like this."

The roof on the Ollerich home was ruined and vinyl siding was dented. Two tractors and machine sheds were severely dented, and a 1995 Dodge pickup truck was totaled.

"It just cremated the pickup," Ollerich said.

Insurance adjusters won't



Lloyd B. Cunningham/Argus Leader
Irvin Schreurs inspects hail damage to his corn crop Monday in a 40-acre field southwest of EROS. "In a lot of fields around here, there's nothing left," Schreurs said.

know the extent of the crop damage for at least a week. Many of the bruised and torn corn stocks are expected to dry up and deteriorate in that time.

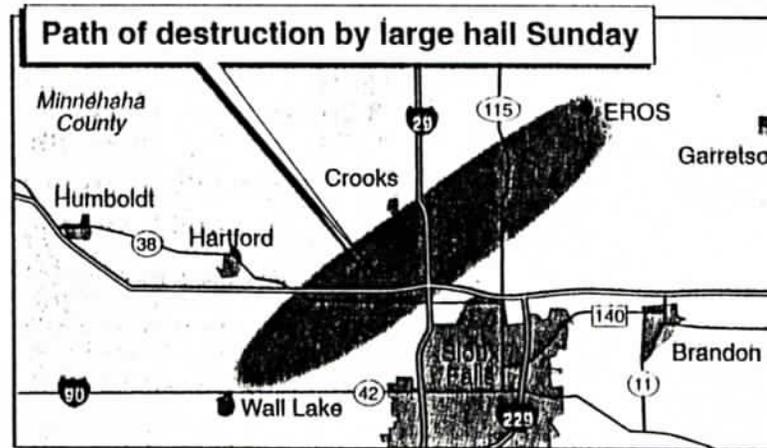
Ollerich's neighbor, Irvin Schreurs, said his fields were badly damaged, particularly 40 acres of corn.

"In a lot of fields around here, there's nothing left," Schreurs said. "If we would have had wind, it would have really been bad."

Hailstorms are nothing new for the 66-year-old Schreurs. In 42 years of farming, his crops have been hit by hail at least a dozen times, he said. And although these hailstones were the largest, the damage wasn't the most severe.

"I saw it worse in 1991. We lost about half of everything," Schreurs said. "You couldn't even tell where the bean fields were, and the corn was stumps. There were snow banks of hail."

Three miles southwest of EROS, the hail was golf-ball size, said Keith Harvey, who farms with his dad, Duane. He



Lynn Schiefelbein/Argus Leader

estimated that the hail damaged at least 700 acres of corn in the area.

"It got really bad to the south and east," Harvey said. "This is the worst my dad has been hit, and he moved here in 1971."

Hail was reported in a narrow strip from Wall Lake to northwest of Garretson.

A couple of miles south of Crooks, Dorothy and Willus McGee felt fortunate that their crop damage wasn't as severe as many farms.

"After riding around a little bit, we felt very lucky," said. "Lord, it was terrible."

Near Buffalo Ridge, hail the size of a ping-pong ball smaller, said resident Sheel Songstad, whose fiancée's was totaled in the storm.

"We got a lot of hail, but had torrential rain," Songstad said. "There was an unbelievable amount of water in an amount of time. In about years here, I've never seen anything like that before."

Argus Leader

MONDAY, JULY 14, 1997 ☆

SIOUX FALLS, SOUTH DAKOTA

Hail squashes area crops

■ Stones as large as softballs flatten fields from near Hartford to Garretson

■ Storm busts windows in EROS Center, damages vehicles parked near building

By JILL CALLISON
and RANDY HASCALL
Argus Leader Staff Writers

Hail as large as softballs pummeled crops Sunday afternoon in a narrow band that extended from Wall Lake to north of Garretson.

Some of the softball-sized stones thumped the EROS Data Center west of Garretson, punching through windows and damaging a satellite dish, trees and parked cars in a 20-minute barrage.

The hailstones pounded indentations in ground softened by rain and turned soybeans into bare wisps shorter than the grass mowed Saturday in Sioux Falls yards.

The hail started near Hartford, Wall Lake and Ellis, hydrologist Mike Gillispie of the National Weather Service office in Sioux Falls said. The storm passed through the Crooks, Renner and Baltic areas, then north of Garretson.

The largest reported hailstones — baseball to softball size — were within a couple of miles of EROS, Gillispie said. Stones were two inches in diameter southwest of Hartford



Hail stones started falling near Hartford and moved across northern Minnehaha County.

the barn.

"It didn't even leave sticks in the windows," Lyle Dressen said. "And the barn roof looks like someone was up there with a ball-peen hammer. At least it's not as bad as a tornado."

A metal mailbox near the Clarence and Phyllis Fiegen farm south of EROS Data Center had been pounded so badly that a hand could barely fit inside. Vehicles and buildings on the Fiegen farm took a similar beating.

A hailstorm in 1992 lasted twice as long, but the hailstones weren't as large, Fiegen said. Sunday afternoon, he estimated his soybeans were a total loss



More than three hours after the storm passed, golf-ball-sized hail still lay in ditches and on the ground. It began about 4 p.m. with pea-sized hail that gradually grew, said Kent Hegge, who farms in the EROS area.

"The worst hail came in a four- to five-mile stretch," he said.

The crops he examined had been wiped out, Hegge said.

"The beans took it the worst," he said. "They're susceptible to hail. And I think it's too late to replant."

Northeast of Renner, baseball-size hail pulverized corn and soybeans on the Lyle and Carol Dressen farm.

"It looks like a battle zone around here," Carol Dressen said. "There was big-time damage."

West-side windows on the barn, hog shed and house were shattered. Large hailstones lay scattered throughout the inside of the home.

Lyle had just parked his pickup truck in the garage when the storm struck. Carol, who was in the house, had to find protection from flying glass. The hail punched holes in the house siding and the new tin-roof on

and 25 to 30 percent of his corn crop was gone.



Clarence Fiegen

"The corn had a very slow start because of the very cold nights, but in the last few weeks it had done excellent," Fiegen said. "The beans were a little behind."

The siding on a fifth-wheel camper, purchased last April as the Fiegen home during the custom combining season, was pockmarked, with windows broken and fiberglass cracked.

"My wife was so proud of it," Fiegen said. "It was nice, real nice. We had it sitting by the house, so she could outfit it. Who thought we'd get chunks of ice?"

A Peterbilt cab had a Pac-Man-shaped hole in one mud guard, and the rounded corner of the hood was dented.

"I didn't think hail could hit hard enough to dent that," Fiegen said.

In the EROS employee parking lot, Mike Benson of Hail storm/ See 6A



Frank Robertson/ Argus Lead

A soybean field north of Sioux Falls takes a beating from the hail that observers say got as large as softballs in a narrow swath extending from Wall Lake north to Garretson.



Randy Hascal/ Argus Leader

Megan Patton cools off Sunday in rain water sprayed by a passing car on West Third Street near Williams Avenue in Sioux Falls.



Frank Robertson/ Argus Lead

A tow truck operator hooks up a demolished car belonging to Mike Benson of Sioux Falls Sunday in the EROS Data Center parking lot.

Traffic deaths drop

■ HIGHER SPEED LIMITS

DON'T HURT: When the federal government allowed states to raise highway speed limits 20 months ago, outraged safety advocates said the move would cause 6,400 more traffic fatalities a year.

That hasn't happened. Nationwide, traffic accident deaths actually dropped slightly in 1996.

Story: Page 6A

Mayor takes huge bite out of overtime costs

Some say reductions may come with price

By MIKE TRAUTMANN
Argus Leader Staff

So far this year, the city of Sioux Falls has slashed employee overtime to its lowest rate in years.

CITY PAYROLL REPORT



Earning city overtime

The city of Sioux Falls has reduced the overtime it has paid to part-time and full-time employees from \$1.6 million in 1993 to \$565,693 so far this year. Overtime as a portion of total wages has dropped to 3.5 percent for 1997.



Police overtir difficult area

By MIKE TRAUTMANN
Argus Leader Staff

If you've been busted drunken driving in Sioux Falls over the past few years, there's a fair chance you'd recognize T Persing.

He's likely the one who arrested you.

For nine years, Officer Perpatrolled during Sioux Falls' hours, looking for the weak vehicle that means another d

Hail storm

Continued from 1A

Sioux Falls watched a tow bar being attached to his 1996 Honda Civic. The car, he said regretfully, had 5,600 miles on it and at least \$5,000 damage. The back window was obliterated, the windshield a cobweb of cracks and the side windows broken.

"I looked out and saw how dark it was, and then little pea-sized hail started and it got bigger and bigger and then it got really bad," Benson said.

Benson's car was in the lot because he'd come in to try and catch up on paperwork.

At least a half-dozen employee cars sustained severe damage, while several government-owned cars also were dented.

EROS maintenance crews had been called to clean up in the storm's aftermath and make preliminary repairs. Windows on the building's northwest side were broken, as was the security glass in the library's roof and the skylights in the atrium.

At least one satellite dish was damaged, said Don Becker of Brandon, a video producer at EROS who was filming the damage to send to headquarters in Reston, Va.

Dean Morrison lost a strip of corn and beans on his farmland west of Ellis, and said several neighbors were hit too.

"Some of these soybeans and corn really got murdered. Some fields got mowed off," he said. "I'm thinking maybe I'll get some silage if I'm lucky. The beans are totaled."

Rain fell rapidly, with areas receiving one-half to one inch within 15 minutes. Water stood in several Sioux Falls streets where storm drains couldn't handle the downpour.