

Storm destroys some crops in Holland Marsh

By Mark Pavilons

Desperate for rain, farmers didn't expect the storm Friday night that brought heavy downpours and hail.

It left a path of destruction not seen in recent years.

According to King Councillor and Marsh farmer Avia Eek, crops were "mowed down like grass."

One farmer had a field with romaine lettuce ready to be harvested and it's gone. Another farmer had his crop of kale damaged with no chance of recovery. Some fields of carrots may be able to be reseeded. Eek pointed out some of the carrot fields have already been reseeded once due to drought, heat, and wind damage. The weather this week calls for extreme heat.

Some farmers who had transplanted onions were "walloped" by this storm. They would have been harvesting that crop in a month or so.

"Our farmers have been working 19 hours a day irrigating for weeks now trying to keep what was seeded growing, in order to have a marketable crop with the high standard of quality that the Holland Marsh is world renown for. For those of our farmers who have paid for crop insurance, the financial loss will be lessened to some degree. Farmers will still experience a substantial financial loss. After talking with the farmers I have, it's clear many have come to terms with the damage, and the loss. Some have decided their next steps, (reseeding), while some are still struggling with what their next step should be. There are no crystal balls in food and farming."

Eek said from a business viewpoint, it's a tremendously difficult decision to give up on a crop that you have invested time, valuable resources, labour, and thousands of dollars in, just to disc it under, and leave it for fear that if you do, reseed, you still may not end up with a crop at the end of the season.

This storm revealed the nature of farming, which Eek said "it not for the faint of heart!"

The Eek family farms on Strawberry Lane and Aileen Avenue were untouched. Their onion transplants on King Street, which would have been harvested in another month and half, were cut in half.

"Even if we take measures to encourage healing of the plants, with the rain we received, the heat forecasted for this week, and given the onion variety, it is doubtful that even if we try to salvage that crop of onions, we will end up with a quality product. But, then again, you never know."