Chapter B3. Harvesting on wet soil

PURPOSE OF THIS CHAPTER

To summarise the problems encountered when harvesting on wet soil

CHAPTER CONTENTS

- harvesting on wet soil

ASSOCIATED CHAPTERS

- D6 ‘Improving soil structure by crop rotation’
- D7 ‘Cultivation and soil structure’
- D8 ‘Landforming and soil management’

THE DILEMMA

A mature crop loses yield and quality in wet weather, and there is urgency in the harvest. Vegetable crops destined for processing are often harvested to suit factory requirements, and potentially harmful effects on the soil may be ignored. Harvesting on wet soils poses a dilemma: while it is important to harvest the current crop, the harvesting operation will damage the soil for the next crop. Soil preparation for the next crop includes what you do during this harvest.

Harvesting on wet soil is costly for three reasons:

- it takes more energy to drive on soft soil than on hard soil (creating compaction costs you money through higher fuel use)
- repairing damaged soil is costly
- the lower yield in the following crop is a cost.

STRATEGIES

- Where possible, avoid traffic on wet soils, especially clay soils.
- Make allowance for harvesting aids with permanent access roads.
- Consider the use of precision farming techniques, for example, permanent tracking and global positioning systems.
- Rejuvenate damaged soils with organic matter or selective cultivation at the right soil moisture level. (See Chapter D7.)