

Burning Un-harvested Crops

Burning: what to consider

In cases where mechanical methods to remove the crop are not possible, or insufficient to handle the residue, burning could be used as a last resort to remove crop residues prior to seeding.

Check with your county or municipal district, most will require permits before burning your crop. If you are in the Forest Protection Area of Alberta, you need to get a fire permit from the Government of Alberta. There may also be fire bans or restrictions in place, especially early in the spring. Please check albertafirebans.ca for any restrictions and remember to contact your crop insurance agency.

Burning an un-harvested crop will not provide any value to you from the crop, and may negatively impact the soil. Smoke generated from burning can have air quality and visibility impacts that can be far-reaching, depending on weather conditions.

Should I burn my crop to prevent diseases and mycotoxins from spreading?

Burning may destroy crop residues but will have little-to-no effect on crop diseases. As a result, burning crops is not recommended to prevent diseases or destroy mycotoxins.

Should I burn my crop to remove the crop residue?

Burning reduces soil organic matter, carbon and nitrogen. It can have negative effects on soil erosion, permeability and air quality. Finally, burning disrupts the balance of microorganisms in the soil reducing the biological activity and overall soil health.

If you decide to burn: burning tips

- Do you have a fire permit? Follow the directions on the permit, or act as directed by the municipality.
- Make sure you also have sufficient property insurance in the event that your fire gets out of control, or spreads to neighboring land.
- Monitor your burn; don't leave your field while it's burning.
- Burn small areas at a time.
- Have a plan to deal with any emergencies.
- Have a water truck and other equipment on hand.
- Till the outside rounds of the field to create a fire break.
- Monitor after your burn.
- Consider baling the un-harvested crop, removing it from the field, and later burning the bales away from your field. Burning the bales in a smaller, controlled area is easier to monitor and manage than burning swaths in a field. This option will also help preserve the ground cover, residue and organic matter in the field.

Call 310-FARM or visit agriculture.alberta.ca/unharvestedcrops for more information.

