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Pulse School: So, you got hail — can you rescue this crop?

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It seems to be the summer of storms across the Prairies, with some extreme weather events bringing devastating hail and damaging crops.

Many farmers are walking their fields and seeing varied amounts of impact, and are asking the question: What now? Will my crop grow through this?

Pulses can be extremely resilient crops, and as Jenn Walker, research manager with Alberta Pulse Growers (APG), explains in this Pulse School episode, sometimes the best thing you can do is just give your stand some time to re-coup.

Often after a hail event, there are many recommendations that come to the forefront. Apply this, apply that, and your crop will be back to normal. These kind of sentiments spurred APG and Farming Smarter out of Lethbridge, Alta., to do some research, to see what realistically could be done to help a crop post-hail damage.

“One of the trickiest things when we are studying hail, is that hail is very patchy. So even within a single field, you can have a lot of different levels of damage,” she explains. “So what they did is they created a machine called the ‘Hailinator’ — a very cool machine which used chains, and then worked with crop inspectors to rate the damage.

The study looked at different growth stages, from really early on in the season, to the four- to six-leaf stage, partly through flowering, and then when the plants had podded.

The study included growing field pea, faba bean and dry bean, at southern, central, and northern locations in Alberta, and subjected the plants to lighter damage — around 30 per cent — and heavier damage — around 60 to 70 per cent. Then, they tested out different rescue attempts, such as applying fungicide or nutrients, with no successful outcome of a “band-aid” fix.

Walker can confirm from the research that adding nitrogen or other nutrients is a waste of money, regardless of the plant’s stage.

That said, after hail damage, and even if your crop has recovered, your crop is now very vulnerable and Walker suggests scouting the crop more often, considering a two-pass fungicide plan (always following the label, of course) to protect any remaining yield potential; however, the research completed does not suggest that yield will be improved.