

# 2010 Winter Wheat Acreage May Shrink To 1960s Levels

LITTLE ROCK, ARK.

Arkansas farmers are planting winter wheat, though with continued rain, expectations for the crop are iffy, say extension agents and economists for the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture.

"It has been a tough year to get wheat planted with the never-ending rainfall and late harvest of our summer crops" said Jason Kelley, extension agronomist for wheat and feed grains for the Division of Agriculture. "Many producers are getting anxious about whether it will dry up soon enough to plant wheat.

"It is not too late to plant wheat, but the optimum planting date is now for much of the state," Kelley said. "Optimum yields are normally expected from wheat planted in October for north Arkansas and from mid-October to mid-November for south Arkansas.

"We can still have good yields when we plant outside of the optimum planting dates, but yields tend to vary more from year to year, depending on the weather during the rest of the season," he said.

If weather wasn't enough of a deterrent, wheat prices were.

"We don't have any wheat planted and may not plant any at all due to the weather and prices," said Keith Martin, White County extension agent for the division. "There is very little interest."

Wheat prices have risen \$1 per bushel since Oct. 1, said Scott Stiles, extension economist-risk management for the Division of Agriculture, adding that "producers could get close to \$5, but some areas of the state are not quite at that level yet.

"July wheat futures closed today at \$5.67," he said. "New crop bids were ranging from \$4.94 to \$5.12 around eastern Arkansas."

Stiles said he visited with a seed salesman in Stuttgart who said "the majority of their wheat seed had gone to Louisiana, Texas and some in the Bootheel of Missouri, Alabama and a little bit in northeastern Arkansas."

In Lonoke County, Extension Agent Keith Perkins said there are maybe 500 acres planted.

Due to the muddy fields "some wheat was planted by air."

"Some acres have emerged," he said. "It was planted earlier on a lighter soil. I don't know how much more will be planted.

"We still have corn, rice, soybeans and milo to harvest in the county," Perkins said. "We need some sunshine to finish out the year, but looks like not much for this week."

Lafayette County has about 3,500 acres of wheat planted, said Joe Vestal, the county's extension staff chair for the division.

"That was planted in early September before the rains began and this was primarily for grazing purposes," he said. "Our producers have lots of beans and cotton left to harvest and can't get their wheat planted until it dries up."

Other counties with wheat include Clay, Mississippi, St. Francis, Phillips and Jackson.

"I know of one producer who aerially seeded some wheat into standing soybeans a few weeks ago as the leaves began to fall," said Randy Chlapecka, Jackson County extension staff chair for the division. "I saw one grain drill going last Wednesday before the rains hit on Thursday ... this will almost certainly be our smallest wheat acreage in forever."

Andy Vangilder, Clay County extension staff chair, said he had "one grower who got 32 acres drilled last week and sowed 80 acres into corn and shredded cornstalks as a cover," he said. "That should work if we get more rain."

The National Agricultural Statistics Service said that for the week ending Oct. 25, winter wheat plantings were at 25 percent, up from 16 percent last week but behind the 2008 progress of 30 percent. The service said 12 percent of Arkansas' winter wheat plantings had emerged.

"We were predicting somewhere in the 350,000-acre range for planting this fall, down slightly from last year's 430,000 acres," Kelley said. "Compare that to the 1.07 million acres planted the year before."

"You have to go back to the early 1960s to find a year that planted acres dropped below 200,000 acres in Arkansas," he said. "That could happen this year." Δ