

2011 Arkansas Winter Wheat Production 272 Percent Over 2010



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LITTLE ROCK, ARK.

The Arkansas winter wheat crop had a strong finish despite spring floods, with production up 272 percent from 2010, according to a report released Friday by the National Agricultural Statistics Service.

Arkansas' winter wheat production was pegged at 30.2 million bushels, a giant leap over the 8.1 million bushels produced last year. The state average yield was estimated at 58 bushels an acre, up four bushels an acre above 2010. Arkansas producers harvested 520,000 acres, up from 2010's 150,000 acres.

However, there should probably be an asterisk and a footnote of explanation about the differences between the 2010 and 2011 harvest, said Jason Kelley, extension wheat and feed grains agronomist for the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture.

"The crop harvested in 2010 would've gone in the ground in 2009, the year we didn't have much opportunity to plant because it just rained and rained in October and was wet the rest of the fall," Kelley said. "If you look at the last 20 years, that season really sticks out as having very low acreage.

"Realistically, the crop we harvested this past summer is what it should have been," he said. "The reason it was up more than 200 percent was because there wasn't much planted the year before."

Still, like Roger Maris' old home run record, there's no asterisk that can take away from the strength of this season's effort.

"The crop was really good before we had all those spring rains," Kelley said. "All the rain in April did impact the crop and if we hadn't had all that rain, we would've had a record."

"It turned out better than we thought," he said.

Strong prices and low fertilizer costs made wheat very attractive in the fall of 2010, said Scott Stiles, extension economist with the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture.

"Wheat futures pulled in more acres," he said. "The July 2011 contract settled at \$7.12 last September, \$7.83 in October and \$7.28 in November. Futures held at an attractive level through planting to get the acreage."

Fertilizer prices were much lower a year ago than they are today. "Margins were positive," Stiles said. Δ