2011 Wheat, Corn Acres Rise With Commodity Prices

LITTLE ROCK, ARK.

Rising commodity prices for grain may mean more corn and sorghum acres 2011 and have helped increase winter wheat acres over the 2010 crop, said Jason Kelley, extension wheat and feed grains agronomist with the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture.

The 2010 production year was one of the hottest and driest on record in Arkansas, and the state's grain crops demonstrate the effects of the 2010 drought.

"One of the things that saved crops in 2010 was irrigation," Kelley said. "Dry weather began early in the year and has hung on until just last month, and farmers had to irrigate almost twice as much as usual because of it. It saved the yields, but made farming costs rise dramatically."

Arkansas producers planted 380,000 acres of corn in 2010, which was 30,000 acres less than in 2009, and the state's average yield is estimated to be 150 bushels per acre, which is two bushels per acre less than in 2009. In contrast with recent years, Arkansas corn producers had a dry and warm weather to plant corn in March and April, and corn emerged quickly and looked better than it had in many years. However, dry weather began early, and many producers had to start irrigating corn in May, and many had to irrigate 10 to 15 times, which is about twice as much as normal.

"The dry and warm weather also lead to a very early harvest," Kelley said. "The good news, however, is foliar diseases were minimal across much of the state, and the Southwestern Corn Borer, the number one corn insect pest, was generally low in numbers. For 2011, Arkansas corn producers are looking to increase acreage due to increased grain prices."

Grain sorghum acreage also was down in 2010. Arkansas producers planted 35,000 acres of grain sorghum, 2000 acres less than in 2009. Approximately half of the acreage is irrigated, and non-irrigated grain sorghum yields were low in many instances this year due to drought. Many producers had to treat fields for control of sorghum midge and/or corn earworm feeding, but foliar disease pressure was low this year due to drought conditions. The good news for 2011 is grain sorghum acreage looks to rebound as many producers are looking at including grain sorghum in their crop rotations to help combat glyphosate-resistant pigweed, and the grain price for next year is higher than it was in 2010. Perhaps hardest hit in 2010 was the wheat crop. In June of 2010, Arkansas wheat farmers harvested one of the smallest acreage crops in recent history – only 150,000 acres. The low acreage was due to several factors, including low grain prices compared to other crops, and the terribly wet fall in 2009 that prevented many acres from being planted. But, the average yield was 54 bushels per acre, which was 10 bushels per acre higher than in 2009.

"During the summer of 2010, wheat prices rose dramatically and greatly increased interest in wheat planting for the fall of 2010," Kelley said. "However, the increase in demand for wheat was somewhat diminished by the lack of seed wheat to plant. Since little wheat was planted the previous year, seed wheat supplies to plant this fall were far less than typical."

As a result, many producers were able to get seed but at a high price. Drought conditions, which resulted in low soil moisture for planting, may have discouraged some producers from planting as grain prices for other crops – cotton, corn and soybeans – were steadily increasing.

"Rains have finally come statewide, and all of our wheat has been planted, although some of it later than what would be desired," Kelley said. "In fact, it's estimated Arkansas planted 400,000-500,000 acres of wheat this fall, more than double what was planted in the fall of 2009." Δ