



Mature Jackson County rice field at sunrise, August 30, 2012.

(U of A System Division of Agriculture photo by Kevin Quinn, Extension Videographer)

## 2012's Intense Heat A Two-Edged Sword For Rice

### *Rice acreage expected to drop in 2013*

#### STUTTGART, ARK.

The intense heat that worried Arkansas rice farmers in the summer of 2012 also turned into an ally, said Jarrod Hardke, extension rice agronomist for the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture.

"The heat this year was a double-edged sword, but it led us to having a record 163-bushel per acre yield," he said. "The previous high was in 2007, about 160 bushels per acre. That's a pretty good jump."

Arkansas is the nation's largest rice producer and in 2011, rice was a \$1 billion crop for Arkansas producers.

According to USDA's Nov. 1 estimate, Arkansas' rice crop came in at 7,340 pounds per acre, approximately 163 bushels, up from the October estimate of 7,000 pounds per acre and 8 percent above last year's 6,770 pounds. Rice acres were up to 1.28 million in 2012, versus 1.15 million acres last year. The old record of 7,230 pounds per acre was set in 2007.

The downside to the heat was the high nighttime temperatures in June and July. "That spelled potential quality issues," Hardke said.

"We didn't see that many quality issues when harvest began, but Isaac and subsequent thunderstorms came through when a lot of the crop was ready to harvest," he said. "Those storms caused rewetting and drying of the kernels, causing fissuring, and the quality steadily declined."

Cracks in the rice can cause the kernels to break apart as the bran is scrubbed away during milling. Ideally, kernels will retain at least 75 percent of their original size through milling, its quality described as head rice yield. Kernels are also expected to be more translucent than

opaque.

"We did see head rice yield issues and increased chalkiness," Hardke said. Decreases in quality mean decreases in the amount of money growers receive for their crop and also complaints from export markets, Hardke said.

The warm spring, followed by frequent triple-digit readings, turned out to be an ally in the farmers' annual battle against insect and disease pests. Early in the season, growers were afraid the warmth would mean a bumper crop of bugs.

"What we ultimately saw was a low insect year," he said. The speculation was that "the initial wave of insects came out early, and there were no crops to eat and the population crashed. That left the rest of the season for them to catch back up to their original numbers."

On the weed side, "there is some concern for resistant barnyardgrass in Clearfield rice," he said. "Beyond that, we've been doing pretty well and can do better in terms of weed control."

"We could stand to avoid situations where we are growing continuous Clearfield rice," Hardke said. "Good stewardship involves rotating out of rice" to help keep pest resistance at bay.

Disease problems were minimal during the dry, hot year, with no widespread outbreaks, he said.

Next year, rice acres will likely decrease, losing out to higher priced soybeans and corn. Robert Coats, extension economist for the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture, said Arkansas acres could drop to 1.12 million in 2013, down 162,000 acres from the 2012 harvested acres. △



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