

Arkansas Farmers Inching Closer To 100-Bushel Soybeans

FAYETTEVILLE, ARK.

In a crop that generated \$1.49 billion for Arkansas farmers averaging 38 bushels per acre in 2011, growing 100 bushels an acre in Arkansas isn't impossible, "just very challenging," said Ryan Van Roekel, a University of Arkansas Ph.D. student whose research is focused on that magic number.

The Arkansas Soybean Association through its "Race for 100" yield challenge contest is awaiting the state's first 100-bushel yield and it has yet to give away \$50,000 to the first producer to hit that threshold, said Dawn Howe, an association spokeswoman. The challenge began in 2007, inspired by Purdy, Mo., soybean grower Kip Cullers, who can consistently hit the 100-bushel mark in some of his fields.

"A cash incentive is one way to reward the great soybean producers in Arkansas," said Howe. Farmers must be registered contestants at the time the yield is produced, and if more than one farmer hits in the same year, the cash award will be split among the winning farmers, she said.

Once 100 bushels per acre is achieved the "Race for 100" contest will end.

While no Arkansas farmers have met the "Race for 100" contest criteria, Van Roekel said that "a few people have had spots in their fields yield over 100 bushels an acre but getting that averaged over five acres in a square or rectangle for the entry into the contest is very challenging."

Research performed this summer by Van Roekel, is expected to help boost the statewide average yield of 39 bushels per acre.

His best performing research field, 28 acres in Newport, averaged yields of 90 bushels per acre during a growing season that saw unusually high temperatures during the mid-season. Two other fields near England and Helena yielded 86.7 bushels and 86.5 bushels, respectively, Van Roekel said.

The Helena plots were heartbreakingly close to the triple-digit goal. "We had enough pods there for 100 bushels per acre if the seeds had filled to the weights observed at Newport and England," he said. The smaller seeds were likely a byproduct of a charcoal rot infestation due to the hot, dry weather and despite frequent irrigation.

"Most people don't put nitrogen on soybeans because they fix their own nitrogen," Van Roekel said, adding that he and his adviser, Larry Purcell, professor in the Crop, Soil & Environmental Sciences Department, "believe that with our soils, we may struggle to reach 100 bushels per acre without supplemental nitrogen. Also remember that to reach 100-bushels-per-acre, your potash and phosphorus needs are doubled what they are at 50-bushels-per-

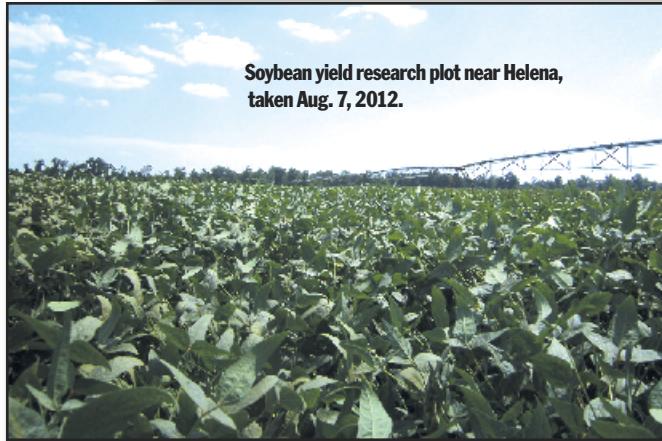
\$10,000 for top producers across three divisions. Past winners have reported yields ranging from 50 to 93 bushels an acre.

The incentives programs also help the Arkansas Soybean Promotion Board to document production management practices



Soybean yield research plot near Newport. The field here yielded 90 bushels per acre.

Photos courtesy Ryan VanRoekel



Soybean yield research plot near Helena, taken Aug. 7, 2012.



Soybean yield research plot near Newport, taken Sept. 6, 2012.

acre."

For those motivated farmers looking to claim \$50,000, Van Roekel says every farmer and every field is different.

"Focus on early planting, timely irrigation, variety selection and excellent pest control," he said, adding that farmers seeking to maximize yields may have to adjust their fertility programs to match their yield goals.

Since offering the 100-bushel contest, the Arkansas Soybean Association is also sponsoring the "Go for the Green" yield challenge to keep motivated farmers interested. The 2010 program has already disbursed lesser cash awards of up to

and strategies of growers obtaining exceptionally higher yields than the norm, said Lanny Ashlock, who is an associate vice president for the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture and liaison to the state's soybean promotion board. Ashlock is a former extension soybean specialist.

Arkansas growers planted some 3.2 million acres of soybeans in 2012. Most of the soy crop in Arkansas is concentrated in the eastern half of the state. And, compared with other soy producing states, Arkansas ranked ninth according to 2011 USDA data.

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