



This tractor on a Jackson County farm was axle-deep in thick mud this week as growers tried to capitalize on a few dry days to harvest. Producers across Arkansas will have to spend the winter doing extra repair work from this fall's harvest.

Photo courtesy Shannon Hall



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Arkansas Harvest 2009: Pockets Of Optimism Between Rain Storms

HELENA, ARK.

Near constant rain has caused between 25 percent and 80 percent damage in some cotton, rice and soybean fields in Arkansas as growers struggle to harvest what's left during brief periods of dry weather, according extension agents, agronomist and economists with the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture.

In Phillips County, there was some good news for cotton farmers.

"For sure, there is no total loss," Robert Goodson, Phillips County extension agent for the division of agriculture, said Thursday. "While we won't meet the crop average for Phillips County, it won't be as bad as everyone thought at first."

However, some soybeans in his county were fungus-fraught, rotting or splitting.

"There are a lot of fields that have above 25 percent damage due to the wet weather," he said. "I have heard horror stories of damage in the 80 percent range."

Still, while the yield won't hit 2008's 50-bushel-an-acre mark, "this year, I think we'll be in the low 40-bushel range," Goodson said. "The saving grace for the soybean crop is the price. It is still strong."

"Cash price at Marvell is \$10.05, which makes lower yields look better," he said.

Scott Stiles, extension economist-risk management, said the moisture was chipping away at the strong prices.

"Moisture discounts, foreign material, mold in the samples – all these discounts add up to dollars," he said, adding that despite the strong prices, "the discounts are getting pretty deep on soybeans."

Cotton growers were in the same boat.

"Yesterday, December cotton futures closed at 68.38 cents," Stiles said on Thursday. "This helps, but it is a small consolation when you can't harvest the crop you have."

In Prairie County, Extension Staff Chair Brent Griffin grimly tallied the damages in a report for the county judge. Griffin estimates rice, soybean and cotton losses in his county alone to be just under \$10.5 million. Soybeans were the hardest hit, at slightly over \$6 million.

"The longer it rains, the uglier it gets," he said, adding there will be consequences for next year. "Seed quality for soybeans for planting next year's crop could get tight. There's simply no good seed."

Jackson County Extension Staff Chair Randy Chlapecka said river and stream flooding "has completely ruined some soybeans."

"In regards to rice, we still have about 30 per-

cent of our rice still in the field, which is unheard of for this time of the year," he said. "There is great concern about how much the late planting plus the wet, cool late summer and fall has impacted yields and milling of the remaining crop."

Chlapecka also said the effects of this year's rain would stretch into 2010. Jackson County had some of the state's heaviest rain this year: recording more than 19 inches from Aug. 1-Oct. 21.

"Very little wheat has been planted and we're rapidly approaching the end of the optimum planting window," he said. "We'll almost certainly end up with the smallest wheat acreage in forever."

"While several were not planning on planting any wheat this year for economic reasons, it is still an important crop for many," he said.

Between Sept. 20 and Oct. 18, there have been only about a dozen days suitable for fieldwork, Stiles said.

In Jefferson County, growers have been hitting the fields hard – when they can.

"Over the past few days, many growers have finished rice and corn harvests and have turned their attention to the soybeans," said Jefferson County Extension Staff Chair Don Plunkett. "Usually when we have a rain event, the farmers can get back into fields in just a few days. This year, it has taken weeks at a time."

Stiles said growers will be busier than usual prepping for next season.

"Field roads are in poor condition and growers are making ruts and long hauls with grain carts," he said. "There will be lots of getting stuck in the coming days. This tears up fields and equipment."

"There will be a lot of time spent in Spring '10 repairing both of those," Stiles said.

On Tuesday, Gov. Beebe declared 20 counties disaster areas due to rain: Ashley, Boone, Bradley, Calhoun, Carroll, Chicot, Clark, Cleveland, Columbia, Dallas, Desha, Drew, Lafayette, Lincoln, Lonoke, Madison, Miller, Nevada, Prairie and Union Counties state disaster areas due to damage caused by heavy October rains and flooding.

Three counties, Ashley, Desha and Lonoke, have been declared solely for agricultural damage. The agricultural declaration will assist in obtaining possible federal assistance for Arkansas farmers.

While the current rain is expected to clear on Saturday, a new front will bring a 30 percent chance of rain beginning Sunday night. Δ