

# Chicot County: "We Are Going To Be Lucky To Make Half A Crop"

LAKE VILLAGE, ARK.

The rain-shocked 2009 growing season may prove to be devastating for Chicot County, where more than 65 percent of the county is farmland.

On Monday and Tuesday, Gus Wilson, Chicot County Extension Staff Chairman for the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture, made the rounds, visiting farmers and getting a first-hand look at what record rain has left of crops in the state's southeasternmost county.

He said on Tuesday that he believed Chicot and neighboring Ashley and Desha counties were the hardest hit by the 2009 rain.

"It's bleak," Wilson said. "It's going to really hurt these poor Delta counties because here,

have nearly 100 percent damage."

"Driers in Chicot are rejecting beans because their quality had deteriorated so much," Wilson said. Beans that are being taken are so deeply discounted that growers are lucky to get \$3 a bushel. Non-discounted prices on Tuesday were running between \$9.89 a bushel at Des Arc, Augusta and Clarendon to a high of \$10.31 at Memphis, Tenn., said Scott Stiles, extension economist-risk management, for the U of A Division of Agriculture.

"This is the worst I've ever seen and I've been a county agent for eight years and around farming all my life," Wilson said.

Last week, another county agent said that as a group, farmers tended to be optimistic people.

**Some beans are barely breaking the water's surface as ditch water backs up into this Chicot County soybean field.** University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture photo by Gus Wilson



**This Chicot County soybean field seems equal parts water to soy. Farmers in the southeasternmost county of Arkansas may wait days or weeks to be able to get back into their fields.**

University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture photo by Gus Wilson

agriculture is all that we've got."

Earlier this season, the harvest outlook was promising.

"In September, I was pretty happy with what I was seeing in the fields," he said. "Now we are going to be lucky to make half a crop compared to the last couple of years, all because of the weather."

"Seven or eight weeks ago, we were looking at 1,100- to 1,200-pound cotton" lint yield per acre, Wilson said. "Now we're 500- to 600 pounds."

The soybeans are just as bad. Back in September, "we had a good soybean crop. The yield was there," he said. "We have lost at least 60 percent to 80 percent due to the weather."

"Our rice is going to be half," Wilson said.

Wes Kirkpatrick, Desha County staff chair for the U of A Division of Agriculture, said "I have heard instances where producers had fields that traditionally yielded 1,200- to 1,400 pounds per acre are yielding 700-800 pounds per acre this year."

Soybean quality is also an issue, and the quality issues vary widely from field to field, he said. "Some fields have no damage and other fields

"They have to be," he said last week while 5 inches of rain fell in 24 hours in some parts of Arkansas.

Wilson agreed, but added Tuesday that "I have never seen such a discouraged bunch. It boils down to them saying, 'I'm not going to be able to pay my bills'."

Kirkpatrick heard the same in his county.

"Most farmers are ready to get this one behind them so they can lick their wounds and pray for a better year next year," he said.

Last month, Gov. Beebe designated 23 counties disaster areas due to flooding and rainfall, including Ashley, Chicot and Desha. Last Thursday, the governor's office said it was working with USDA to obtain a declaration that would help farmers in Ashley, Bradley, Calhoun, Chicot, Conway, Cross, Desha, Faulkner, Independence, Jackson, Jefferson, Lafayette, Lincoln, Little River, Miller, Monroe, Perry, Phillips, Poinsett, Pope, Prairie, St. Francis, Union, White, Woodruff and Yell Counties. If the declaration is issued, it will also apply to all counties bordering on counties covered by the declaration and provide emergency low-interest loans for farmers. △



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