

# Corn Verification Yields Set New Record In 2007

## LITTLE ROCK, ARK.

**K**evin Lawson's first year as corn verification coordinator for the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service will be a memorable one.

Corn producers in the verification program had a dream crop with yields that would please any good producer in the Corn Belt.

Lawson took over as coordinator of the program in March. Before that he had been a county agent for 12 years.

It was a great year statewide, with farmers harvesting a whopping 590,000 acres of corn, compared to a 10-year average of 259,000 acres. They were rewarded with a record statewide average yield of 160 bushels an acre, 14 more than the previous record and 24 more than the 10-year average.

While 160 bushels is laudable, the five farmers participating in the verification program were rewarded with a whopping average of 200.3 bushels an acre, a new record in the eight-year history of the program.

"I had one cotton farmer near Watson in Desha County who had always grown cotton, and this year he only grew corn and soybeans," Lawson said. "He had a really good year and averaged 200 bushels of corn an acre. He was very, very pleased with the yield and price he received."

Corn acreage and prices are up because the alternative fuels industry needs corn to produce ethanol.

"Ground that has never seen anything but cotton went to corn last year," Lawson noted.

The only problem Lawson reported was a field in Crittenden County that had to be replanted and incurred additional seed and tillage costs. It still yielded a respectable 171 bushels.

"The highest yield was in Randolph County where the farmer averaged 218 bushels," Lawson said. "It was planted behind corn. That's a question that a lot of corn producers for this

year. 'How will corn planted behind corn perform?' We proved that it can be done."

Lawson said years of continual corn production can cause a buildup in insects and diseases. After this year, he said, farmers might consider rotating corn with another crop such as soybeans, rice, cotton or wheat.

"You usually get a yield bump with a crop planted after corn because fertilizers applied to corn remain in the soil, and corn stalks tilled up and left on the ground improve the soil structure," Lawson said.

"A no-no," he said, "is planting corn behind rice because of the anerobic condition of the soil after rice production, and you tend to get a phosphorus deficiency in the soil after rice."

Lawson said that after the Easter freeze, followed by cold, wet weather, a fifth of the state's corn crop had to be replanted. After that, most farmers experienced a dream growing season with timely rains, followed by perfect crop dry-down conditions.

The verification farmer in Desha County only furrow irrigated three times. Ten times a season for furrow irrigation is not uncommon, according to Lawson.

Lawson said he and county extension agents were in the fields every week to help farmers. He said they learned the need for timely applications of inputs and good variety selection. Their work was made possible by the Arkansas Corn and Grain Sorghum Promotion Board.

How is Lawson going to top 2007?

He has twice as many corn fields – 10 – to manage, but he hopes to follow 2007 with another great years.

"Unfortunately, farmers are already seeing higher input costs, and they haven't planted any seed. The higher cost is for seed and fertilizer. Last year, seed, fertilizer and diesel costs accounted for 70 percent of all crop production costs for corn verification participants." Δ