

Did October Bring Some Good

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Will we see a repeat of the drought of 2012 in 2013? This is the question that hangs in the air as central Illinois growers try to wrap up harvest. While nobody has the ability to forecast what the 2013 growing season will look like, we can at least say that October has changed the drought narrative. That improvement in the storyline can be observed by looking at rainfall data, by looking at subsoil moisture estimates, and by looking at topsoil moisture ratings. A review of the October 15 Illinois Weather and Crops Report from the Illinois National Agricultural Statistics Field Office provides a snapshot of all three.

Rainfall, of course, varied throughout central Illinois over the last month. However, rainfall totals were an improvement over 2011 totals according to the Illinois Agricultural Statistics report. The rainfall situation in central Illinois is already a few inches better than what it was at this time last year.

Subsoil moisture ratings still present reasons for concern, but those subsoil moisture estimates also give area growers a reason to celebrate. The subsoil moisture situation continues to be far less than ideal with around 70 percent of central Illinois subsoil rated poor to very poor for moisture. That means that the winter months will still be critically important to offset the risk of a repeat drought. However, that central Illinois rating is a dramatic 20 point improvement over where central Illinois sat just two weeks ago.

The topsoil moisture situation provides an-

other reason to smile. As of October 15, topsoil moisture was rated at about 20 percent poor to very poor in central Illinois. That score was an improvement over the topsoil score from two weeks earlier. That shift toward improved moisture reserves was not mediocre. Instead, it was little more than fantastic – an improvement of 40 percentage points in just 14 days. Perhaps more importantly, that moisture improvement trend differs substantially from the trend observed at this time in previous years. Over the last ten years, only two years have presented a substantial improvement in topsoil moisture during the first half of October. Most of the time, the topsoil moisture rating has either remained fairly unchanged between early and mid-October or it has actually deteriorated (as much as a dozen to couple dozen percentage point reduction). Furthermore, the mid-October topsoil moisture rating (20 percent poor to very poor) also bucks the historic trend. Mid-October topsoil moisture has averaged around 40 percent poor to very poor over the last ten years.

Rainfall was an improvement over last year. Subsoil moisture – while still tenuous – has dramatically improved. Topsoil moisture has bucked the historic trend – improving during the first half of October. Topsoil moisture is only half as bad as the ten year average. All are very good signs. Nobody can state with certainty that there will not be another drought in 2013. However, the fall of 2012 is bringing some good news to central Illinois, and we should pray that the good news keeps coming. Δ



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