

Drought Putting Damper On State's Soybean Yield

PRINCETON, KY.

Kentucky's soybean harvest yield estimate for September was down 8 percent from August but up 69 percent over last year at this time, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The increase is due to greater yields per acre and more acreage in soybeans. On the surface the number sounds impressive until the poor yields of 2007 are taken into consideration.

Though on the whole, this year farmers have not been hit with the horrendous weather conditions of 2007, the 2008 season for double-crop and full -season soybeans has been book ended by extremes: cool weather and an overabundance of rain in the spring and a late summer drought. This means that where planting was rain-delayed, crops hit their reproductive stride just as the precipitation dried up.

"The double crop beans are being affected quite drastically by our lack of rainfall, particularly during August and September. Most of them will be in the reproductive stages during those two months," said James Herbek, University of Kentucky grain crops specialist, explaining that the lack of moisture is particularly harmful to the setting of the pods and, in particular, the filling of the soybeans in those pods. Insufficient rainfall could cut the yields.

In Christian County, soybean harvest started two weeks ago with early yields in the 35-40 bushel per acre range. That correlates with the 36 bushels per acre yield estimates by the USDA, which is down three bushels from the August forecast.

"That's somewhat lower than what we would like for full season beans," said James Stone, agriculture and natural resources agent in Christian County. "However, the dry weather really did play a hard time, I think, on a lot of

them. In spots of the county where we had some rain, I expect them to be a little better than other areas."

Herbek said that earlier planted crops and earlier maturity groups, such as group III, will most likely yield better than later plantings and the group IVs. The group Vs are later yet.

"Those are going to take the full brunt of this lack of rainfall," he said.

Clint Hardy, agriculture and natural resources agent in Daviess County, said they were lucky enough to catch a few strategic rains in late July that benefited the group III beans.

"The bean yields that we've been hearing of in the field so far, full season beans have been in the 50s or higher," he said. "That's about typical for us, maybe a little higher yielding than last year. Although we were very dry in August, the cool August helped tremendously."

He said he wouldn't be surprised to see a yield decline on some of the longer season soybeans.

"We get into some of these group IVs, although they have a lot of height, they did fill pods in September when it was extremely dry, which could reduce test weight."

Herbek doubts if average yields this year will be nearly as bad as last year, but they still won't reach the normal state average range of 40-45 bushels per acre.

"We're probably going to be in the mid- to low-30s bushels per acre range, I would say right now. I think it will be lower next month because nothing has shown any improvement. Any rainfall we receive now is going to be almost too late for the majority of our full season crops. And our double crop soybeans, a rain in the next week or 10 days will help them some, but beyond that it probably won't help them anymore," he said. △