

Dry Weather Spells Relief For Arkansas Farmers

LITTLE ROCK, ARK.

After heavy spring rains and flooding delayed planting, then hurricanes damaged crops late in the season, the weather has generally been good as Arkansas farmers begin wrapping up a stressful year. They're working long hours to get crops out of the field.

"We've had really good weather, and farmers have started picking cotton hard and heavy," said Dr. Tom Barber, extension cotton specialist with the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture.

"We just got started on irrigated cotton, mainly around Marianna and other parts of southeast Arkansas. Most picking is going on south of Interstate 40, but pickers have been harvesting dryland fields in northeast Arkansas and are starting to move into irrigated fields."

Cooler weather this week will hurt defoliation efforts in younger cotton, Barber said. Defoliants – needed to remove leaves – don't work as well in cool weather snaps.

"I don't have a good handle on yields yet. Producers in southeast Arkansas may be suffering losses from rains and boll rot, but we don't really know yet. Gins are just now getting fired up."

Barber said Arkansas cotton farmers will harvest about 610,000 acres.

Dr. Chuck Wilson, extension rice specialist, said rice harvest progress was way behind normal for this time of year.

The delay was caused by late planting, resulting from spring rains and flooding and more recent problems from Gulf hurricanes.

"So far, statewide yields have been a little disappointing, anywhere from 10 to 15 percent off from normal. Yields aren't bad, they're just not up to what farmers are used to cutting. Few people are talking about yields, which means

they have nothing to brag about," Wilson believes.

He said an early report on milling yields looks favorable.

Farmers have just begun harvesting the 3.2 million-acre soybean crop planted in the spring, according to Dr. Jeremy Ross, extension soybean specialist.

"Statewide, we're probably three weeks behind on harvest," he said. "We're hearing that farmers are cutting good yields. Considering early problems, the crop has turned out pretty well."

Will anyone win the Arkansas Soybean Association's Race for 100 (bushels per acre) contest this year and collect \$50,000?

"We got a late start planting the crop, and early planted beans usually have the best yields," Ross said. "We'll have better yields than last year, but it would surprise me if anyone hit 100 bushels."

The USDA has increased its yield estimate for Arkansas from 36 bushels an acre to 38. Ross explained that late planted beans and double-cropped soybeans (planted behind another crop) benefitted from cooler temperatures and more precipitation in August and September.

Meanwhile, harvest of the 460,000-acre corn crop is nearly over, said Dr. Jason Kelley, extension wheat and feed grains specialist. "Overall, yields are down compared to last year," he said. "The hurricanes didn't help. It's just a different year from 2007 when we set a record of 168 bushels. This year, we could be down 10 bushels off that."

"We're still getting pretty good corn yields. In some instances, it has taken a little longer to get crops out, thanks to the hurricanes and seeing some lower test weights. We can almost see the light at the end of the tunnel." Δ