

# Erratic Weather Has Hurt State Corn Yield Potential

## MISSISSIPPI STATE, MISS.

**W**hile Mother Nature is showing corn producers a little mercy after her relentless drubbing earlier this year, the futures market is not.

Excessive rainfall early in the season caused many problems for the crop, but recent showers and temperatures in the 80s have kept plants healthy, allowing them to fill out ears.

"Most of the crop is approaching maturity, but ample rainfall and cooler temperatures are always welcome until the corn reaches maturity," said grain crops agronomist Erick Larson of the Mississippi State University Extension Service.

Harvest should begin about Aug. 10. The estimated size of the crop is about 800,000 acres, a jump from the 2008 crop of 730,000 acres, Larson said.

"Because of adverse weather, this season can be characterized as one of the most challenging in history, and the crop is not yet out of the field," he said.

A continual torrent of rain this spring, particularly in May, delayed planting, killed seedlings, stunted the corn and delayed applications of fertilizer and herbicides. This situation limited ear size and plant growth, which reduced northern Mississippi's yield potential. Saturated soils also promoted problems now showing up as stalk rot and ear mold.

"These problems are killing plants prematurely in severe cases," Larson said.

In early June, producers experienced a complete weather turnaround within a 10-day period, which stressed plants further.

The weather changed from extremely wet and cool to hot and dry, shocking the corn and further hurting the crop's overall yield potential, Larson said.

"Irrigated corn yields are expected to be below average," Larson said. "Dryland corn may turn out a little bit better than the last few seasons, but yields will vary if plants experience stress."

Dennis Reginelli, Extension area agronomist

in Noxubee County, said the corn potential in northeast Mississippi greatly varies from farm to farm.

"We had some dryland corn that didn't get any rain and may only average 60 bushels an acre," Reginelli said. "Other farms had enough rain during the last half of June and much of July for the crop to develop into some of the best corn we're going to see in the state. That corn may yield at least 200 bushels an acre."

The recent rains have helped much of the Delta's irrigated corn, allowing producers to cut back irrigation.

"If we get another rain, we'll probably be done," said Leflore County Extension agent Jerry Singleton. "Right now, the crop is looking good, and producers are getting ready to harvest. It's hard to say what the yield potential really is, so we'll have to wait to find out."

As producers ready their combines, they are keeping an eye on December corn futures. The news there is not good.

The corn crop in Iowa and southern Minnesota is exceeding expectations, and that news puts pressure on prices. Midwestern producers also increased their acreage despite a late start. This created the worst of both worlds for corn producers in Mississippi, said Extension agricultural economist John Anderson.

"December corn futures in June were \$4.50 per bushel," Anderson said. "The futures on July 21 were \$3.11 per bushel, which is a loss of \$1.40 per bushel within five weeks. On the production side, we have Midwestern producers with good potential and ours with lowered potential."

But some Mississippi producers will have good yields and decent prices, Anderson said.

"The market sometimes overreacts to production problems, and we may see some price recovery for corn later on," he said. "Weather factors such as frost or storms can cause late-season losses, and prices could rebound." Δ



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