

# Garlic, Onions, Higher Fertilizer Prices Plague Arkansas Wheat Farmers

**LITTLE ROCK, ARK.**

Arkansas' winter wheat growers are spending their spring wrangling with ryegrass, wild garlic, onions and higher fertilizer prices.

The state's farmers planted an estimated 870,000 acres of wheat, up 50,000 acres from last year.

"Ryegrass is our most serious weed problem, and left uncontrolled, it can cause major yield reductions," said Dr. Jason Kelley, wheat and feed grains extension agronomist with the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service.

Applying an herbicide against ryegrass is more effective in the fall. However, many wheat producers waited 'til spring because last fall was too wet, or the wheat was planted late or the ryegrass hadn't emerged before winter, Kelley said. Arkansas farmers are also battling Hoelon-resistant ryegrass, but newer herbicides have proven effective.

"Another weed farmers are seeing is garlic. It doesn't necessarily hurt yields, but garlic bulbs can contaminate the grain and will give the wheat a garlic odor, which will result in dockage when the producer sells the wheat," he said.

"The good news is the grain prices are good this year – at historic high prices – and the crop looks good, so producers are more likely to be able to afford to apply herbicides," Kelley said. "You can't afford not to treat, especially with

ryegrass."

Meanwhile, wheat producers are applying nitrogen fertilizer – as the weather allows between rains, according to Kelley.

Fertilizer prices have soared and urea, a source of nitrogen, is selling for nearly \$550 a ton, compared to a year ago when it was around \$400.

Don't skimp on fertilizer, Kelley advised. "With good grain prices, we don't want to be short on fertilizer needs for the crop, which will reduce yields," he said. Make sure you're getting the most bang for your buck by being timely with nitrogen applications.

"Now is the time we recommend that producers put out spring fertilizer applications in two parts," he said. "Half of the application should go out in the first half of February, and then you should come back three or four weeks later and apply the rest."

Since some farmers have sulfur deficiency problems, especially in sandy soils, they should apply ammonium sulfate with the first spring nitrogen application.

Half of the crop was planted late, in November, because of October rains, and for that reason, it's important to be timely with spring nitrogen, Kelley said.

"A lot of fields look really good even though some of it was planted late," Kelley noted. "I'm pleased with how it looks, and it has good potential." Δ