

Gloomy Forecast Follows Rain For Arkansas Crop Producers

JONESBORO, ARK. Some Arkansas farmers will reap a harvest of red ink this season and it will be months before the losses can be quantified, say agricultural economists and agronomists for the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture. Extended spring rain caused crops to be planted late, which meant a late harvest. More rain in the fall ruined grain kernels and cotton bolls, prevented disease and insect control and created mud that further delayed harvest. All of this added up to an expensive growing

Cotton Cotton growers are getting a double whammy. "Most of the cottonseed, especially south of I-40, is worthless," Stiles said. "This poses a huge problem for both the ginners and producers." Ginners normally accept cottonseed as payment, but with poor quality seed, "the ginners don't have an asset to pay their bills with," he said. "In addition to cottonseed sprouting in the boll, the fiber has lost, and continues to lose, value due to quality loss," Stiles said. "We don't



Photo on Right: Kernels at the base of this cob are making new plants after weeks of rain.



Nearly every kernel in this head of sorghum from a field near Marianna has sprouted thanks to the recent wet conditions.

season that, in some cases, led only to unsellable crops. Those with good crops aren't going to get much for them either. "Commodity prices have been weakening," said Scott Stiles, extension economist-risk management with the UofA Division of Agriculture. "If all goes well through harvest, the Midwest is going to do its part to provide the U.S. with a record corn and soybean crop, depressing prices. Wheat prices are at two-year lows. "On the bright side, Arkansas growers that purchased crop insurance are really thankful they made that decision," he said. "For now and over the coming weeks they'll be in contact with their agents and learning what move to make next." Many growers will hit the fields, regardless of the mud. "Mud won't stop a harvest. The growers will go in and 'mud the crop,'" said Don Plunkett, Jefferson County extension staff chair for the UofA Division of Agriculture. "They'll be going after anything they can get from the field. They don't have the luxury of time or day-length to wait. "They'll track and rut up the fields to get the crop out," he said. Fixing the ruts to make the field usable for next year's crop may take two or three passes with a disk or heavy cutting disk, which is "quite expensive," Plunkett said. "It's a really sad ending to a year with an equally sad beginning," Stiles said.

Sorghum Sorghum growers were seeing high moisture levels prompt sprouting. "Many grain elevators are already telling producers that they will not accept grain sorghum that has high levels of sprouting," Stiles said. According to the National Agricultural Statistics Service, only 35 percent of the state's sorghum had been harvested, compared to 77 percent for the five-year average. "Much of the balance will likely be destroyed," he said. Jason Kelley, extension wheat and feed grains agronomist for the UofA Division of Agriculture, said the sorghum outlook was glum. "I talked with the large grain terminals early this week and they know the sprouted sorghum is out there, but have not gotten any of it," he said. Growers bringing in grain with 9 percent to 15 percent or more sprouted kernels "would be graded as sample grade, a quality too low for export markets. Sprouting problems last year prompted growers to cut acreage from 70,000 last year to 45,000 this year. Kelley speculated that "problems this year may further reduce acreage for next year."

Corn Little corn has come out of the fields since the rain began, dimming what had been a sunny outlook for the crop back in August. "By now, we usually a majority of the corn harvested, and some of the ground worked and somewhat ready to go for next year," Kelley said. "It's a vicious cycle. Late harvest puts us behind for next year."



This sprouted and dirty boll shows the worst of what's happening in Arkansas' cotton fields after weeks of almost uninterrupted rain. Photo courtesy of Kerry Stiles

know yet how many dollars-per-acre-lost this will ultimately translate into. "Besides quality loss, there is cotton on the ground and the crop won't harvest as clean as it would have normally," he said. If it weren't for rains over the past few weeks, "harvest would be in full swing in the south half of state by now," Stiles said. "It's really heart-breaking. Some cotton in the southern part of the state had excellent yield potential." Ken Smith, extension weed scientist for the UofA Division of Agriculture, said on Wednesday, that some cotton growers were determined to capitalize on the few dry days by applying a defoliant. "They are hoping to get a break in the weather next week and get some cotton out of the field," he said. "They feel the weather has already cost them considerable yield." Smith said the ability of the defoliant to resist rain varies, some becoming rainfast within an hour, while others require six to eight hours of drying. **Rice** A line of storms with high winds Monday night caused additional damage in rice. "Downed rice is all over the place and there is lots of slow progress in harvesting those fields," Plunkett said. The rice harvest is running behind, Stiles said. "We are 23 percent harvested and should be 48 percent." **Soybeans** Some soybean growers had to plant four times as repeated rains washed out previous plantings in the spring. "Growers are out of money to spend on insecticides and fungicides unless soybeans are really good and-or the insects or disease are really too much for them to tolerate," said Plunkett. At least a 20 percent chance of rain remained in the forecast through Saturday, according to the National Weather Service offices at North Little Rock and Memphis, Tenn. Δ



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