

Good Wells, Good Soil, Good Rice

Extended Intense Irrigation Needs Presents Challenges

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Sam Atwell, Agronomy Specialist, New Madrid County Missouri, gave an update on this year's rice crop and what he expects for 2013 at the recent Missouri Rice Farm Field Day held in Glennonville, Missouri.

"With 125,000 to 150,000 acres, rice acreage is down to half of what it was a few years ago. We are always going to have quite a bit of rice because of the soils and certain conditions that will grow rice here. Currently, this year's crop, a third of it is really good. It was planted early and those who had good wells and good water with particularly good soils are going to have a high yield," said Atwell.

Atwell explained the effects of the heat on the rice crop. "We don't think it was dramatic in those areas that had plenty of water. We have a third of the rice that is probably going to have an average yield. The remaining third of the crop has a drag on it because of the heat and the drought but, most of that is due to lack water."

Atwell was asked if he the water table has dropped. "Actually no, my understanding is that the water table and our water supply, in the Bootheel and Northeast Arkansas are excellent because it stays the same all the time. We just don't pump it down much. The problem was just the long extended periods of heat and on certain wells which were not pumping well to start with."

Pumping capacity became a problem. "Many growers were trying to irrigate two crops. Normally we just use our irrigation to supplement between rains, when we do not get rain, then we have got to irrigate 100 percent. Those wells are rolled over often times into another 80 to irrigate beans or something else. One of the crops gets shorted for a few days and that is part of the problem. The other problem is just breakdowns on pumps, wells and motors. There was such a shortage with farmers buying so much new irrigation equipment that the companies couldn't get there to service them. At times, we had a week or two delay in correcting some problems but by and large we're going to be pretty good on rice."

Drift is another issue Atwell spoke about. "Our commercial guys seem to be doing the best right now and our aircraft is probably the least of our problems. The situation is the resistant weeds

outside the crop. Folks are trying to kill them so they won't go into seed. They are extending their booms out over turn rows towards their neighbors and getting a little too close to their neighbors crop. It tends to burn the rice a little bit. It is no different this year, maybe less even than in the past. It is something we work on."

Atwell added, "we are interested in our water situation in the Bootheel. We have had a lot of



With rice acreage down to half of what it was a few years ago, Sam Atwell, Agronomy Specialist, New Madrid County Missouri, explains what he expects for 2013.

concerns because people think that the drought has caused us to have less water in our water table. We want to make sure folks understand that is not true. The water coming through the Bootheel, underneath, 100 feet deep for the rice wells, is coming out of the base of the Ozarks. We have a shelf here that is unique in that we never run short on water. With the drought we still have less than a foot drop in our aquifer. It will regenerate with the first few rains. It regenerates every year all the way back to the surface of our soil. This winter, right here where we are standing, the water will come out of the wells and seep out on top of the ground."

Atwell explained the shelf extends all the way across Crowley Ridge. "The water comes out of the Ozarks and flows south." Δ

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