

Gustav’s Gusts, Rain Will Cost Some Arkansas Rice Farmers Dearly

REYDEL, ARK. About 30 percent to 40 percent of the state's rice crop in southeast Arkansas has been hit hard by remnants of Hurricane Gustav, according to the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture.

High winds and rain pelted the crop and blew over the plants, a condition called lodging, according to Ralph Mazzanti, an extension rice research verification coordinator.

“One farmer at Reydel (Jefferson County) has 1,800 acres of rice that was ready for harvest, and now it's flat,” he said.

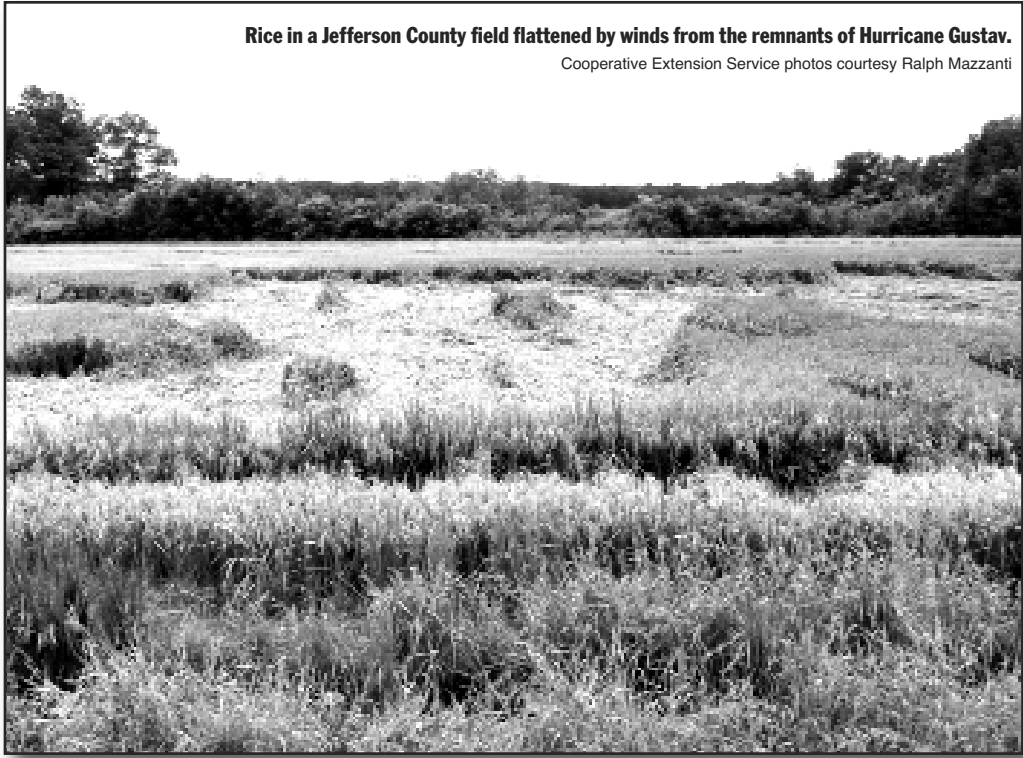
The significance of that is the farmer, Jessie Briggs, will have to run his combine slowly to

Dr. Chuck Wilson, extension rice agronomist for the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture, said the harvest will be slow and costly.

“I’m going to estimate one of three fields will have some lodging, varying from 10 percent to 90 percent of the fields,” Wilson said. “The average is about 35 percent in southeast Arkansas.

“This will slow the harvest, cause increased wear and tear on machines, use more diesel fuel and take three to four times longer to get out the crop,” he said. “Running equipment through wet fields will cause rutting, which will cost farmers more money to get fields worked up for next crop.”

Rice in a Jefferson County field flattened by winds from the remnants of Hurricane Gustav.
Cooperative Extension Service photos courtesy Ralph Mazzanti



pick up the rice plants so the grain can be harvested, Mazzanti said. “He’ll use much more fuel. They were already out the additional expense this year of fuel and fertilizer, and now this is another big time blow.”

Mazzanti said he has heard reports of as much as 30 percent of rice down at farms in Lonoke, Lincoln and Arkansas counties.

“We were really concerned about this storm before it hit,” he said. “We’re right in the prime of harvest time. I had 7.5 inches of rain at my house in White Hall (Jefferson County) between Monday afternoon and Thursday morning.”

Briggs, who has a total of 4,500 acres of rice, said the storm “has the potential for putting us out of business. We’ve got a pile of money in the crop. There’s nothing you can do.



Ralph Mazzanti, an Extension Rice Research and Verification Coordinator, for the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture, examines rice damaged by high winds from the remnants of Hurricane Gustav.

“It’s going to be rough,” he said. When asked if he needed government aid to recover, he said, “I’m, not looking for a handout. Give me a couple of months of good weather, and we’ll see where were at. We’ve never been in this situation.”

Briggs said his Clearfield and Wells varieties held up much better than his hybrid varieties.

He said his main problem is flooding on the 1,800 acres of lodged rice.

“We’re trying to pump 7 inches of water off the field. It’ll take me a week at least,” he said.

Mazzanti said what farmers need now is plenty of sunshine.

Shattering, a condition where the rice comes off the grainhead, is another potential problem.

“It can cause yield losses from 10 percent to 60 percent,” he said.

This year’s harvest was already delayed by this spring's flooding. According to the Arkansas Agricultural Statistics Service, for the week ended Aug. 31, only 2 percent of the crop had been harvested, and that was days before Gustav moved in.

Wilson said the damage is concentrated south of I-40 to Lake Village, with little damage along the Mississippi.

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