

Heat Affects Late-Planted Cotton, But Ark. Fields Still See Near-Record Yields

LITTLE ROCK, ARK.

Arkansas' cotton fields were not untouched by the brutal heat of summer of 2012, yet growers managed to squeeze a near-record yield from their fields.

The Dec. 1 USDA estimate pegged cotton at 1,084 pounds of lint per acre, up from its 1,051 pound estimate in November. If that turns out to be the final state average yield, it would be the second highest. The state record was set in 2004 with an average of 1,112 pounds per acre.

USDA said cotton was being grown on about 580,000 acres in 2012.

USDA's final estimates for the 2012 growing season will be out at the end of January.

"The yield estimate is real positive and it may go up even more if there are adjustments to the acreage estimate, which I thought was a little high," said Tom Barber, cotton agronomist who will be working as a weed scientist in 2013 for the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture.

"We have harvested an excellent crop in many areas, but we also have had some cotton that has disappointed us," he said. "It seems yields are either real high or disappointing, not much middle ground. Early planting dates and early irrigation may be the reason our yields were so good this year."

Barber said that about 20 percent of the cotton crop was dryland – completely dependent on rain. "Much of it did suffer and yielded only a bale or so per acre," he said.

Early planting, which was made easier by a warm winter, helped the crop in many ways.

"Above-average spring temperatures enabled

us to get into the growing season earlier," Barber said. Those earlier plants were able to mature more quickly by the time nature turned up the heat and turned off the rain. "Later planted cotton seemed to suffer more from heat than earlier planted."

When the growing season was over, "cotton harvest, for the most part, was more than 90



Cotton plants barely keeping their bolls above water after rain Sept. 29-Oct. 1 in Chicot Co., Ark.
(U of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture photo by Gus Wilson)

percent completed by Halloween. Anytime we can do that, it is a good year," he said.

Getting the stragglers out of the field was a little harder though.

"One thing that dragged harvest out somewhat was the weekly rainfall or light showers that didn't hurt much, but kept us out of the field for two or three days," he said. △



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