Near Perfect Wheat Crop Surprises Many

LEXINGTON, KY.

It was a storybook ending after what was a far from perfect wheat production season. The excellent crop has pleasantly surprised many considering the wheat was planted during very dry conditions and continuous rains this spring increased the crop's disease risk.

Many producers have reported record-breaking or near record-breaking yields, good quality and superb test weights, according to agricultural and natural resources agents with the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service.

Kenny Perry, Graves County agriculture and natural resources extension agent, said this was by far the best year producers in his county have ever had.

"Yields are a 150 percent of what they typically are," he said. "Normally yields are in the 50 bushels per acre range. As a county, we probably averaged 80 bushels per acre, and some producers are averaging 95 bushels per acre."

He also said test weights were extremely good, with some producers receiving a test weight of 64 pounds per bushel – the highest he's ever heard of in his county.

It was an equally good year in Todd County, said Curt Judy, the county's agriculture and natural resources extension agent.

"Normally our producers average in the 60 to 80 bushels per acre range, but there are a lot averaging in the 80s this year," he said. "I've had some producers tell me they made over 100 bushels per acre. If it wasn't our best year on record, it was probably our second best."

While harvest numbers are excellent, the weather made the production season a struggle for the state's producers.

"Conditions were very wet in February and March, such that timely applications of fertilizer and herbicides were difficult to make, and conditions for May were wet such that timely fungicide applications were difficult as well," said Chad Lee, grain crops specialist in the UK College of Agriculture.

UK wheat specialists suspect that the excellent harvest was due to several factors.

"I think the key factor was the cool temperatures during grain fill in May," said David Van Sanford, UK wheat breeder. "Cool temperatures favored complete kernel development, and it is very likely fewer kernels were aborted than would have been under higher temperatures."

At times this spring, it appeared many fields had significant levels of Fusarium head blight and/or leaf and glume blotch. Don Hershman, UK extension plant pathologist, said above-average temperatures during the first part of June helped the crop rapidly dry down.

"In essence, the crop outraced the diseases to the finish line, the result being that the impact of the infections was far less than it otherwise would have been," he said. "I also believe that many fields started out with better-than-average yield potential. Thus, small yield reductions related to disease development would not be noticed as much." Δ