

# Record Soybean Crop Decimated By Fall Rain

MISSISSIPPI STATE, MISS.

The 2009 growing season was probably the most challenging for soybeans in more than 50 years, and one lesson that emerges is to diversify the crop, both in planting times and maturity groups.

Trey Koger, soybean specialist with the Mississippi State University Extension Service, said the state's soybean crop is valued at an estimated \$431.5 million, down 37 percent from the 2008 value of \$686 million. However, the crop lost an estimated 38.5 percent of its value before it could be harvested.

"We were sitting on a record crop because of acres and potential yield," Koger said. "Then it started raining in September and didn't stop for about eight weeks. We watched a really good crop deteriorate before our eyes."

Planting was late for most soybean producers as April and May rains delayed planting. In some situations, soybeans had to be replanted as many as four times because of persistent rains or flooding.

"We had a crop with a lot of variability with respect to when it was planted," Koger said. "Planting is typically done for most acres by early to mid-May, but we planted into August this year. We harvested those acres in November and into December rather than September and October as is normal."

The very challenging spring was followed by one of the driest months of June on record.

"A lot of acres were in pretty tough shape going into July, but then we got some really good weather in July and August," Koger said.

Many growers have compared the 2009 growing season to those of 1957 and 1984, but Koger said from what he hears, this year was much worse for many producers.

"How much crop damage you sustained went back primarily to planting dates and then maturity group. Completely opposite of what we typically see, the later-planted beans had the best quality," Koger said.

Even though early-planted soybeans fared badly this year, Koger said he still advises planting soybeans early next year.

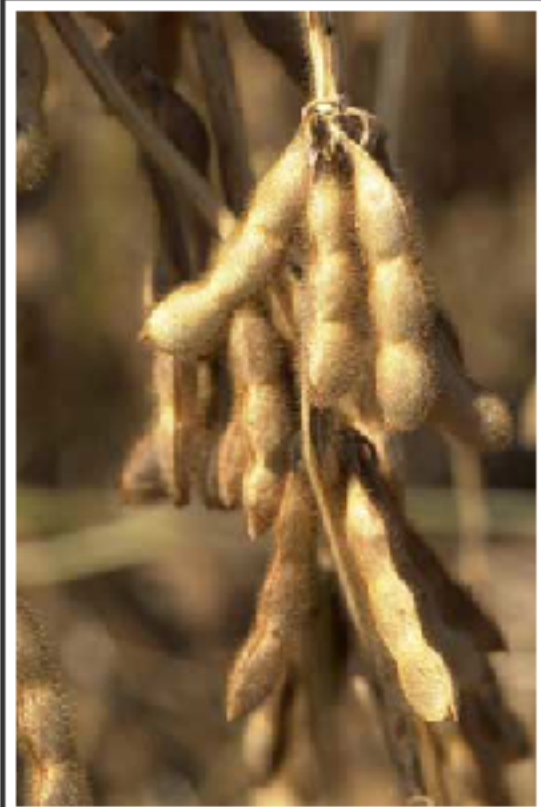
"We have to keep telling people to plant early. It's not good to make wholesale changes to your production system based on one year," Koger said. "What we're really going to preach hard is diversity. Don't plant everything in a very short window of time, and spread out your maturity range. Plant some maturity Group IVs and Vs to spread your risk."

"I understand how difficult it is to space out the planting date of a producer's soybean crop. When the ground gets dry and we are able to get in the field, it is difficult for anyone to hold up and not keep planting due to potential weather that may hurt us later in the year," Koger said.

Charlie Stokes, Extension area agronomy agent in Monroe County, said rain definitely hurt soybeans in northeast Mississippi, but not nearly as much as it hurt beans in the Delta. What saved much of the crop was the late planting dates.

"When we were planting in June, we thought it would be a real problem because we had such a late crop," Stokes said. "It ended up being a blessing in disguise. We had some problems getting them harvested, but we didn't encounter near the damage as did those planted in April."

Stokes said northeast Mississippi soybean producers saw a lot of beans with damage, ranging from 2 percent to 15 percent, but very few fields had more damage than that.



The 2009 growing season was probably the most challenging for soybeans in more than 50 years as farmers watched a potential-record crop deteriorate before their eyes. About 40 percent of the crop was lost in the fields, bringing the state's estimated 2009 soybean value to \$431.5 million. (Photo by MSU Ag Communications/Wm Lytle)

"We had very few with damage in the 40 percent to 50 percent range like we heard about in the Delta," Stokes said. "Farmers in this area saw what happened to Delta growers and those with fields south of here, and they were happy to have been able to still harvest a decent yield."

Prices were good in 2009, averaging \$7.88 a bushel. The state had 2.2 million acres of soybeans, and Koger said he expects similar acres to be planted in 2010.

"Soybeans are still a good crop for Mississippi," Koger said. "We'd be in a lot worse situation right now if we hadn't doubled our soybean yields in the past 20 years." Δ

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