

Rice Survives 2009 Weather Challenges

MISSISSIPPI STATE, MISS.

Though heavy rains this spring delayed some of the state's rice planting, warm, sunny days in June and July helped the crop along, and by late Aug., Mississippi farmers were pleased with the results.

Optimal planting for rice is before May 1, and 75 percent of the state's crop made it in by that date. The remainder was late because of excessive rains during the first few weeks of May.

"Planting in the northern part of the Delta was pushed back until June," said Nathan Buehring, rice specialist with the Mississippi State University Extension Service. "Rice does well in sunshine and warmer temperatures and luckily, we got those conditions in June."

Buehring said lower temperatures in July and August slowed down some rice that was planted late, but that does not mean there will be low yields at harvest.

"It is just a little too early to tell for sure whether or not we'll have good harvest yields," Buehring said. "The slow start and temperature drops could cut yields by 10 percent to 20 percent in a worst-case scenario."

Rice harvest begins in late August and picks up momentum in September, lasting through mid-October. Washington County farmers have already begun harvesting their approximately 40,000 acres.

"Some of our rice went in late and got off to a rocky start, but we are not seeing the effects of that right now. Rice is a tough crop, and it can withstand a lot of stress," said Extension agronomist Lester Stephens. "Of course, only time

will tell if we'll continue to see a good harvest."

Late planting slightly increased rice prices in late May but not for very long. Situations abroad had a much greater effect on the market in late July, said Extension agricultural economist John Michael Riley.

"India, the world's second-largest rice producer, suffered a severe drought. June was the driest month they have had in 83 years," Riley said. "This news from India pushed prices higher, to about \$14 per hundredweight."

Riley said that as the situation in India improved and the market adjusted, rice prices moved to \$13.25-\$13.50 per hundredweight. Rice has been in limited supply for a couple of years and is just now stabilizing.

"As of Aug. 24, about 10 percent of the nation's rice crop had been harvested, and so far it is looking good," Riley said. "Harvest hasn't yet gotten into full swing in Mississippi, but 74 percent of the total crop has been rated good to excellent."

Improved field conditions and warm weather in June helped this year's crop, and initial harvest reports are increasing optimism, Buehring said.

"It is good to see that harvest has been stable so far," Buehring said. "Once the rice is in the bins, we'll get a better reading on whether or not the late planting had any significant effects."

Delta Rice Promotions' 19th Annual Rice Tasting Luncheon will take place at Delta State University on Sept. 18 from 11 a.m. until 1 p.m. Call (662) 843-8362 for more information. **Δ**



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