

Soybeans Maintain Top Row Crop Spot In State

MISSISSIPPI STATE, MISS.

Soybeans rode increased acres and high prices to a second straight year as Mississippi's top row crop, increasing 15 percent to bring an estimated \$604 million to producers in 2008.

Mississippi farmers planted 2.1 million acres of soybeans, 35 percent more than was planted in 2007.

"The increase was primarily due to excellent prices for soybean," said Trey Koger, state soybean specialist with the Mississippi State University Extension Service. "The other commodity crops had lower prices and high costs for inputs, especially for cotton and rice."

Soybean prices averaged \$11.25 a bushel in 2008. The 2007 average price per bushel was \$8.

Soybeans have become more popular the crop performs well in Mississippi and is comparatively inexpensive to produce when compared to other crops. Koger said he expects soybean acreage to increase again in 2009 based on fairly stable soybean prices and relatively high input prices for the other commodity crops.

"We have seen a 30 percent increase in statewide soybean yields over the past 12 years," Koger said. "The increase is due to factors such as earlier planting, earlier maturing varieties, better varieties, better weed management options, and much better scouting and management of insects, disease and irrigation."

Ongoing production challenges for the crop include high input prices, constantly fluctuating commodity prices and the economic situation making it difficult for many producers to get operating loans.

Soybean rust was found in 81 of the state's 82 counties in 2008, but it came late enough that it did not hurt yields. The Extension Service did not recommend any spraying for soybean rust.

Another challenge was excessive rains that

came at harvest for early-planted soybeans. However, this rain gave a much-needed boost to drought-ridden soybeans planted late because of wet spring weather or double-cropping. In 2008, 400,000 soybean acres were double-cropped with wheat, which was more than normal.

The late planting also allowed higher insect pressure from soybean loopers. Angus Catchot, Extension entomologist, said soybean loopers were able to move into the state in high numbers while soybeans were still in production.

"Soybean loopers do not overwinter here. They migrate in each year from southern latitudes such as South America," Catchot said. "Anything we do to delay the crop exposes us to late-season soybean loopers."

Catchot said about 50 percent of the state's soybean acres were treated for this insect pest in 2008. Stinkbugs are always the No. 1 insect pest of soybeans because they infest nearly every acre every year. Catchot said bean leaf beetles are becoming a bigger issue each year because they are developing resistance to pyrethroid insecticides.

"When we make pyrethroid applications for stinkbugs, we're beginning to see more bean leaf beetles in the field afterwards," Catchot said.

Insecticide costs did rise some in 2008, but the biggest increases came from application cost, which has continued to rise.

"This is mainly due to the increase in fuel prices that affects the bottom line of every trip across the field," Catchot said.

In all, producers saw average yield losses of 5.1 percent to insects, down from the 6.8 percent lost to insects in 2007.

Despite a few problems, soybeans look like a good crop again in 2009, and experts are predicting another increase in soybean acreage for the year. Δ



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