

Soybeans Still Stranded, Cotton Modules Sprouting

BLYTHEVILLE, ARK.

December has brought the kind of weather that can keep an Arkansas farmer up at night. "I did see one grower harvesting soybean up past dark on Saturday night trying to beat the oncoming rains," Dave Freeze, Mississippi County extension staff chair for the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture, said last week before the latest round of record-setting rain.

Consecutive weeks of heavy rain and snow left about 2 percent of the state's soybeans stranded in the wet and cold.

Arkansas farmers planted more than 3 million acres of beans in 2011. Clay, Crittenden, Cross, Lonoke, Mississippi and Poinsett all had beans left. In Woodruff County, Extension Staff Chair Eugene Terhune said there were still some 5,000-7,000 acres of soybeans still in the field as of last Monday.

With cash bids around \$11.50 a bushel and expensive diesel for combines to consider, growers will decide how much the beans are really worth, said Scott Stiles, extension economist for the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture.

On Friday, Mike Hamilton, Poinsett County extension agent for the U of A Division of Agriculture, said he'd "just passed a combine, but we're very close to completion."

Cotton producers are also having their share

of sleepless nights this fall.

The soggy weather translated into wet cotton, slowing down gins that had to "dry the cotton a lot more than they would normally" before processing it, Blake McClelland, extension cotton verification coordinator for the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture, said Friday.

Between the time they're plucked from the plant and the time they're processed at the gin, cotton bolls are shaped into modules – giant bricks of bolls that can weigh up to 25,000 pounds. These normally park in a field covered by a tarp until being delivered to the gin.

"A lot of tarps are old and had rain soaking through," he said.

"Some modules are sprouting in the field," McClelland said. "Or it'll be warm inside that module and wet, the seed will start sprouting."

Modules that have sprouted or are otherwise damaged due to the rain will get lower grades, and growers will also see what amounts to a reduction in yields due to rotten and sprouted cotton that "will get kicked out at the gin," he said. All of this adds up to less money for the year a cotton producer has invested in his work.

Arkansas cotton growers were expected to harvest around 660,000 acres in 2011 after a season of flooding, sandstorms, drought and less-than-ideal cool temperatures in September.

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