

State Soybean Crop A Mixed Bag In 2010

MISSISSIPPI STATE, MISS.

Soybeans remained the state's most valuable row crop in 2010, bringing an estimated \$821 million to growers, a 16 percent increase over the previous year.

The increase came despite a somewhat late start and a very hot, dry summer. The Mississippi Agricultural Statistics Service estimates 1.95 million acres of soybeans were harvested, yielding a state average of 39 bushels per acre. The average market year price is estimated to be \$11.45 a bushel.

John Michael Riley, an agricultural economist with the Mississippi State University Extension Service, said the estimated price for 2010 is higher than the prices of recent years.

"The 2009 marketing year average price was \$9.59 a bushel," Riley said. "Acreage was slightly lower this year, so production was down just a bit. The good prices are attributed to the significant increase in estimated value."

Riley said soybean prices should remain strong in 2011, as soybean stocks are low.

While the estimated state average yield was up 1 bushel from 2009, the success of the state's soybean crop varied widely by region. While statewide those with irrigation fared much better than those without it, the northeast part of the state had an especially tough time.

Charlie Stokes, Extension area agronomic agent in Monroe County, said that Lee County marked the dividing line between successful and unsuccessful soybean fields.

"The northern part did pretty well and had a decent yield of 30-35 bushels on average," Stokes said. "A lot of fields in the southern part had yields of 20-25 bushels an acre, and some were even in the teens. The farther south you were, the drier it was this summer."

The northern part of the state had a poor start with heavy spring rains, forcing growers to replant many acres. Once established, fields had more timely rains than those planted farther south.

Stokes said good prices means soybeans, corn, cotton, peanuts and wheat will be competing for the northeast Mississippi acres that mostly grew corn and soybeans in 2010.

"Some people who have never thought about growing cotton are actually thinking about planting it next year," Stokes said. "While growers are optimistic about commodity prices, they are kind of frustrated by the rising cost of inputs."

Jerry Singleton, Extension area agronomic

agent in Leflore County, said about half the soybean acres in his area are irrigated. These acres had excellent yields if they were planted on time or early, while those without irrigation had poor yields.

"The heat did not seem to affect our yields that much unless we really planted late and had stand establishment problems," Singleton said. "Beans planted after wheat in 2010 just never came to a decent stand because of the dry weather."

Singleton said the central and south Delta area typically averages about 37 bushels of soybeans per acre. He estimated irrigated fields in this region saw yields averaging as high as 49 bushels an acre, with the more northern areas doing even better.

"Managing the drought was the specific challenge," Singleton said. "If you didn't have irrigation, you didn't have any way to manage it. Those with irrigation worked very hard pumping water."

He expects a 10 percent to 15 percent increase in cotton acreage in 2011, with those acres coming mostly from soybeans.

Ernie Flint, Extension area agronomic agent in Attala County, described the 2010 soybean crop in the central part of the state as amazing.

"Our yields were exceptional. It was rare to see anybody making yields below 30 bushels an acre, and at one time, our state average was about 24 bushels an acre," Flint said.

Yields ranged from as low as about 35 bushels an acre to as high as 60 bushels an acre.

"We had a lot of localized weather situations. Areas near Highway 51 and Interstate 55 were dry and saw yields mostly between 30 and 40 bushels an acre," Flint said. "But where we had rain, we commonly had yields of 50 bushels an acre."

Flint said only a few acres of soybeans in the hills are irrigated, but about 75 percent of these acres got rain when needed.

"In the hills, if they got the timely rains, they were competitive with the irrigated acres in the Delta," he said.

The success of the 2010 crop combined with favorable prices is good news for 2011.

"For six or seven years, our growers have just been surviving from one year to the next economically," Flint said. "This year, we had very good yields and good prices, and they're the most optimistic they've been in a long time. But it will take two to four years of crops this successful for them to get back in the black." Δ