

State's Soybeans Reach Production Crossroads

MISSISSIPPI STATE, MISS.

Challenged by rains throughout the planting season, Mississippi's soybeans now face make-or-break conditions as they await uniform showers to complete their growth and fill out beans.

"This crop is later than in recent years because early spring rains kept us from planting much of the crop as early as we would have liked," said Trey Koger, soybean specialist with Mississippi State University's Extension Service. "We are at a crossroads where we need a rain to keep most of this crop going in the right direction."

Koger said a dry June means the crop has followed a similar path to last year's soybeans. All growers need now is a repeat of last July's rains that helped produce record yields of 40 bushels per acre on 1.4 million acres.

"Irrigated acres are looking very good, but growers are spending a lot of money because of fuel costs. Growers need the rain, especially on nonirrigated soybeans, but also on irrigated fields to relieve some of the financial pressure," he said. "The nonirrigated acres are on the fence. We have had spotty rains but need a good uniform rain in the next couple of weeks. Without it, this crop will go the wrong direction."

Mississippi growers are expected to plant about 2.15 million acres in soybeans, the largest state soybean crop since 1998.

"We may see a few more acres planted, but fields need more moisture for late plantings," Koger said. "Some beans along the river are yet to be planted after the flood."

Extension agricultural economist John An-

derson said historically high prices are inspiring growers to plant as many acres in soybeans as possible.

"The markets probably overreacted to the Midwest flooding. We've seen a little bit of a correction in early July," Anderson said. "Soybean prices still are good compared to any period you want to look at, except for last month."

Anderson said harvest futures are running around \$15.50 per bushel, but they were as high as \$16.50 the last of June. The average price in 2007 was \$9.25 per bushel.

Koger said growers remain focused on producing this year's crop. Conditions have not been favorable for development of any diseases, including soybean rust.

"We've been rust-free so far, but we are continuing to monitor closely, concentrating more of our efforts in the southwest part of the state where we typically find rust first," Koger said.

Art Smith, Extension area agronomics agent based in Tunica County, said the crop is approaching developmental stages for fungicides and insecticides.

"We had a protracted planting season, so now we have soybeans in all stages," Smith said. "There were some establishment problems because of seed quality, and growers tried to offset that problem by increasing seeding rates."

Smith said timing for rains and irrigation is important.

"Growers are willing to spend a little extra to get as much as they can this year," he said. "They are trying to be timely with irrigation and to do a better job managing their crops." Δ