

Sub-Freezing Temps Will Send Winter Wheat Into Dormancy

LITTLE ROCK, ARK.

Arkansas farmers, still smarting from last year's record rains, may have their first crop concern of 2010, thanks to a string of sub-freezing days, Jason Kelley, extension wheat and small grains agronomist for the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture, said Thursday.

The National Weather Service at North Little Rock was predicting lows in the teens and single digits until Monday.

"The cold weather will not do the wheat any good, since much of it was later planted and is not as well established as in previous years," Kelley said. "I don't think the cold temperatures will do damage; however, it will make the plant go dormant, delaying development."

The normal planting season is during October and November, but the nonstop rain last fall kept farmers from clearing the fall harvest out of fields slated for wheat planting. It was mid-November before much of the wheat was planted. Harvest usually occurs in June.

"Ideally, we would want mild temperatures on late-planted wheat to aid in growth and encourage development of tillers before winter ar-

rives," he said.

"Winter wheat can tolerate very cold temperatures during the winter when it is dormant," Kelley said. "However, as the wheat greens up in February and into March, its cold tolerance decreases.

"At heading and flowering, the plant is very sensitive to freezing temperatures, as we saw during the 2007 Easter freeze," he said. "I don't anticipate that we will have freeze injury problems with our wheat, but having single-digit temperatures on very small wheat plants is a concern."

In 2008, Arkansas growers harvested 980,000 acres of wheat. Last year, that amount plummeted to 390,000 acres.

Kelley said it was likely that Arkansas growers would only plant 150,000 acres for 2010, the smallest number of acres since the 1960s. An estimate from the National Agricultural Statistics Service is due out next Monday. The low acreage is largely due to frustration from lower profits thanks to test weight and quality discounts caused by the record-setting rainfall in 2009. That same rainfall prevented planting of many acres. △



Link Directly To: **PIONEER**