

The weather won't give Adair pecan grower Bob Alberty a break, at least not long enough for him to bring the mechanical shakers into his groves and harvest some nuts. But if Alberty gets a stretch of dry days, he plans to get cracking. "We got shut down with all of this bad weather," he said.

"We got a big crop this year. It's not a great crop. We would have had a real good crop if we would have gotten them all earlier."

But swampy ground is no place for the heavy shakers and pickup trucks. The state's pecan harvest is well underway, though growers aren't too enthusiastic about a lackluster yield and an abundant supply sitting in storage nationwide. Industry analysts are predicting an Oklahoma pecan harvest of well under 10 million pounds, hindered mostly by late freezes and poor weather in the southern part of the state. Some expect the harvest to be just a quarter of last year's crop, which was only considered average.

In northeast Oklahoma, many growers say a string of drought years has their trees hurting and that they don't expect big harvests, even though the pecans coming off the trees are plump and ripe. This part of the state is better than the rest, they say, but nothing to brag about. Oklahoma was the nation's fourth largest pecan producer in 2012, with 25 million pounds. That brought about \$24.7 million to growers and harvesters. Harvesters in northeastern Oklahoma say trees are producing fewer pecans this year. "They say we aren't in a drought anymore, but if you go down to the subsoil, we're still dry," said Martin Mount, a grower and harvester in Beggs. "But the quality is probably the best I've ever seen." Well-timed rains in spring and summer helped the pecan blossoms. "Nearly every flower we had on a tree produced a good nut," Mount said. "It's too bad we didn't have more of them." Most Oklahoma pecan growers have native variety trees, which produce less meat in each shell but more flavor than improved varieties. Mount said his pecans are particularly large this year. Prices for pecans have continued to rise in recent

years due to increases in demand from places like China, which has developed a liking for the sweet and woody nuts. But thanks to a big harvest nationwide in 2012, distributors have a huge storage volume. Since the nuts tend to keep well for long periods in cold storage, that's dampening prices this year. Some buyers, Mount said, claim there are 10 million pounds of Oklahoma pecans in storage across the state, with more on individual farms and groves. Depending on conditions, Oklahoma's pecan harvest typically starts in early November and finishes by the end of the year.

While the holiday season creates the biggest demand for the fruit, most pecans head to packagers and are sold year-round. Skiatook grower and harvester Chad Selman said he's only about a third finished with his annual harvest and plans to spend the upcoming days in groves across the area shaking nuts from trees and collecting them off the ground. "Prices are up from last year and are pretty good, back to normal," Selman said. "They're not high prices, but better than they were." Selman said he hopes to get about 65 percent to 75 percent of a normal harvest out of this year's crop. Last week's ice storm didn't do much harm to his trees, he said, but did slow down his work. "I think we were right on the edge of it," he said. "If it would have kept coming down a little longer or the wind would have picked up, it might have been a whole lot worse." Farther west at Couch Pecan Orchard in Luther, Diane Couch has been busy shelling nuts for holiday pies and cookies sold at her store just off U.S. 66 near her 40-acre orchard. She said many of her customers come back year after year to buy pecans from the orchard that her father started in the 1960s. "It was a pretty decent year," Couch said. "We had good rainfall this year, and the nuts were able to reach their full size." Brianna Bailey of The Oklahoman contributed to this report. Kyle Arnold 918-581-8380

Oklahoma pecan harvest in pounds 2010: 20 million 2011: 6 million 2012: 25 million

2013: 6 million* *estimate Source: USDA Subscribe to Daily Headlines Sign up! * I

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