

Second-best corn harvest on record underway in Missouri

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COLUMBIA — For Robert Alpers, the corn growing season started in April with perfect conditions before the weather turned hot and dry in June.

“We were literally a week away from total disaster,” he said. “Then all of a sudden it started raining. We thought the corn was already hurt, but during the critical growing times, conditions were near perfect.”

Now that he's in the middle of harvesting his 1,800 acres near Prairie Home in Cooper County, Alpers is celebrating a successful season.

“It’s just a fabulous yield, and really a lot of work and a lot of fun,” he said. “We’re out here, and it’s nice when every time you look up, that truck is full and that’s a good feeling.”

This year's corn crop in Missouri was on track to be the second-highest yield on record as of Sept. 12, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Nationwide, the agency was anticipating the highest yields on record.

The USDA forecast an average yield of 165 bushels per acre this year. That compares to an average of 142 bushels per acre in 2015 and the record of 186 bushels per acre in 2014.

The state's soybean harvest was expected to be even better. The USDA estimated record yields in Missouri for the soybean crop, which carries an estimated value of \$2.6 billion. The USDA estimated soybean yields in Missouri will average 49 bushels per acre, compared to 40.5 bushels per acre in 2015 and the record 46.5 bushels per acre in 2014.

“This year we had the most corn planted since 1960 in Missouri,” said Bob Garino of USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service in Columbia.

Garino said this year's harvest of corn and soybeans compared to 2014 as a banner year for crops in rural Missouri. Early planting contributed to a robust harvest, he said, noting corn farmers in Missouri benefitted from favorable weather after the dry spell in June.

The USDA estimated yields in the U.S. will average a record 174.4 bushels per acre, six bushels more than in 2015. It also estimated an 11 percent increase in production from last year, up to 15.1 billion bushels.

“It’s a good year, not just in Missouri but in all corn-producing states in terms of getting crops in,” Garino said.

A larger corn supply, however, means lower prices. Abundant yields for the past three years have caused crop prices to decline, Garino said, while the costs of seed, fertilizer and other inputs increased. He noted the price of corn was tied to the global market.

“There was a period maybe five years ago or so where commodity prices were really high and you looked at the budgets and it was not too hard to see how you could make a profit,” Gene Stevens, MU plant sciences extension professor, said. “But now, paying attention to the details ... is more important than ever.”

For consumers, this year’s large yield might not have much of an effect. Once corn reaches consumers it is usually a small part of a product, Garino said, noting additional costs for transportation and manufacturing.

Farmers in Missouri planted their corn between March 20 and May 31. They started harvesting this month, and as of Sept. 19, 25 percent of the crop was out of the fields.

“We are slightly behind on corn harvest progress,” Todd Ballard, USDA's national agricultural statistics service deputy regional director, said. Usually, most of Missouri’s corn is harvested by the middle of November, Ballard said.

Problems could still arise as the harvest unfolds, Alpers said. Deteriorating corn stalks are fragile, so they are more difficult to harvest. Rainstorms and strong winds could damage corn, as well as soybeans, which is the next crop to be harvested.

“We haven’t started cutting any soybeans yet,” Alpers said, "but just by looking at them and observing them it looks like it’s going to be a record crop for us.”

He gave the same reasons for his robust harvest as the USDA: excellent field conditions and favorable weather.

“This is not an every year year,” he said. “This is more of the exception than the rule, and it’s just something that we all have to remember.”

See the story online here: http://www.columbiamissourian.com/news/local/second-best-corn-harvest-on-record-underway-in-missouri/article_d53c7310-807a-11e6-9d3b-fb16adee2e3c.html