

Wheat Conditions Good Right Now; More Rainfall Needed

Rain falling Kansas last weekend improved the status of the 2013 wheat crop, but much more precipitation is needed to sustain the wheat crop through the winter months.

Throughout Kansas, last weekend's rains were hit-and-miss. Goodland received no precipitation, but Colby received 0.41-inches. Liberal had 0.18-inches, but Ulysses had 1.45-inches. The storm moved from southwest to northeast, dropping a half-inch of rain in Manhattan, nearly an inch in Salina and more than two-inches in southeast Kansas.

Kansas farmers are wrapping up winter wheat planting, with about 90% complete, according to the weekly Crop Progress Report, issued by Kansas Agricultural Statistics on October 15. The crop's emergence has been slowed due to dry soil conditions, and just 42% of the wheat is in good to excellent condition at this early stage.

Scott Van Allen, Kansas Wheat Commissioner from Conway Springs, said he received an inch of rain shortly after finishing wheat planting last week. Before the rain, just about 60% of his newly planted wheat had emerged; the rest should come up now that it has rained. Van Allen, who farms in Sumner County, says wheat acreage in south central Kansas will likely increase due to the drought's impact on fall crops. Much of the area's corn was not harvested; sorghum yields also were compromised by drought.

Throughout Kansas, wheat acres could be up as much as 7%, says Daryl Strouts, executive director of the Kansas Wheat Alliance.

"In areas of central Kansas, some farmers have gotten caught two years in a row with corn failing on some marginal land. I expect these farmers to shift back to wheat either as part of a crop rotation or permanently," Strouts says.

In 2011-12, farmers planted about 5 million acres of wheat in central Kansas; as many as 5.5 million acres could be planted this fall. Although eastern Kansas does not produce a lot of wheat compared to the rest of the state, wheat plantings could increase from 700,000 acres planted a year ago to nearly 800,000 acres this year, he adds.

"Eastern Kansas wheat production has doubled in the last five years, and it will be way up again," he says.

Western Kansas is the wildcard. Southwest Kansas farmers have been plagued by drought for several years in a row and soil moisture conditions are still very poor. However, wheat is about the only logical option for those farmers, as irrigation allocations - which are necessary for corn production - have largely been exhausted. "I expect farmers to plant at least as much wheat as they did last year, if not a little more," Strouts says.

Meanwhile, northwest Kansas farmers are expected to plant about the same number of acres as last year, says Justin Gilpin, Kansas Wheat chief executive officer. "At this point, there is just not enough sub-soil moisture to carry the crop to the 2013 harvest," Gilpin says. "Timely rains are going to be critical in order for this crop to have a chance at success."

