Delaware Growing Season Summary: 2003

WEATHER

Despite excessive October and November precipitation in the fall of 2002, growers were able to get the seeding of wheat and barley fields done on schedule.

The 2003 growing season was plagued with excessive moisture as 10 out of 12 months had precipitation totals above normal. The excessive moisture had the most adverse effect on small grains and vegetable production as disease problems were higher than normal, quality problems occurred, and yield losses occurred because growers could not get into wet fields to harvest in a timely manner.

While the total precipitation amounts which occurred in the planting months of April and May were near normal, the rains were frequent which restricted growers in making progress in getting corn, soybean and other crops planted. Then, virtually the entire state received excessive moisture during the months of June and July. Kent county stayed excessively wet during August while New Castle and Sussex counties experienced near normal rainfall amounts. The excessive moisture put growers in a bind tying to find dry periods to harvest the small grain crop and then plant soybeans.

Cooler than normal temperatures during May and June slowed the development of the corn and soybean crops, but temperatures during the later part of the growing season were slightly above normal which allowed for crop development to be pretty much on schedule as growers got into the October and November harvest period.

SOYBEANS are planted to more acres in Delaware each year than any other crop (about 15 percent of the state's land area). Planting of full season/single crop soybeans started in early May. Planting of double crop soybeans stretched past mid-July as some growers had difficulty getting into wet fields to harvest small grain crops. By mid-July, soybean condition was rated as mostly fair to good. Bloom and pod setting development ran behind normal due to the wet and cooler than normal conditions. Harvest began the last week of September, a few days ahead of normal, and concluded in December.

Acres harvested decreased 4 percent from 2002, to 178,000 acres. Yield was 36 bushels per acre, 11 bushels higher than in the drought year of 2002. Production increased 39 percent from 2002, to 6.4 million bushels. *(Delaware's soybean yields include production from full season plantings, plus plantings following harvest of early season vegetables, barley and wheat. Typically 40-50 percent of Delaware's soybean acreage is "double-cropped.")* Soybean prices rebounded in 2003, to a season average price of $7.25 per bushel. The higher price and improved yield resulted in the value of the crop increasing 76 percent from 2002, to $46 million.

CORN acres harvested for grain in 2003 were down 3 percent from 2002. The 2003 growing season provided plenty of moisture, but below normal temperatures slowed crop development. Yield per acre averaged 123 bushels per acre, up 39 bushels from the drought stricken crop of 2002. Production for Delaware at 55.8 million bushels was up 42 percent from 2002. Value of the corn for grain crop was $55.8 million for 2003, up 40 percent from the previous year. There were 5,000 acres of corn harvested for silage in 2003, half of the amount harvested in 2002. The yield per acre at 16.0 tons, resulted in production of 80,000 tons of corn silage.

WHEAT seeding made adequate progress in the fall of 2002 because of favorable weather conditions that resulted in timely corn and soybean harvests and dry periods between rains during the planting season. The excessively wet growing season coupled with below average temperatures slowed crop development and decreased yields. Maturity progress ran about 25% behind normal. Harvest began the second week of June and ran into the first week of August. There were 47,000 acres of wheat harvested, down 13 percent from 2002. Yield decreased even more, down 29 bushels per acre from 2002, to 41 bushels. This was the lowest wheat yield in Delaware since the 1984 crop. The low yield and decreased acres harvested for the 2003 wheat crop resulted in production at 1,927,000 bushels, down 48 percent from 2002. This was the lowest wheat production in Delaware since the 1986. Value of the wheat crop decreased 49 percent from 2002 to $6.0 million, due to the sharp decrease in production.

BARLEY acreage harvested declined for the third consecutive year. There were 21,000 acres harvested in 2003, compared with 23,000 in 2002. This was the smallest amount of barley acres harvested in Delaware since 1971. The crop wintered over in fair condition, but was adversely affected by the excessive moisture coupled with below normal temperatures over much of the growing season. Harvest got underway at the beginning of June and was completed about a week later than normal. Yield per acre decreased 24 bushels from 2002 to 59 bushels per acre. This was the lowest barley yield for Delaware since 1985. The acreage decline coupled with the yield decrease resulted in production of a 1,982,000 bushel crop, down 35 percent from 2002 and the lowest barley production since 1980. Value of the crop decreased 23 percent from a year earlier to $2.0 million. The season average price received in 2003 was $1.60 per bushel compared with $1.35 in 2002.

VEGETABLES The excessive moisture and cooler than normal temperatures during the 2003 growing season adversely affected the Delaware vegetable industry. The value of all vegetable production in 2003 was $42.8 million, down 18 percent from the drought year of 2002 and down 23 percent from 2001.

While vegetable acreage planted for fresh market was virtually unchanged from 2002, acreage harvested declined by 11 percent due to poor crop quality, vegetables rotting in fields with standing water, and splitting of vegetables due to too much moisture. Total production of crops for the fresh market in 2003 was 172.2 million pounds, down 31 percent form 2002 while the value of fresh market vegetable production was $21.3 million, down 30 percent. Production of vegetable crops for processing faired better, as they are not vine crops or crops which are grown close to the ground such as cabbage. Acreage planted to processing vegetable crops at 39,180 was down 6 percent from 2002. Acreage harvested was also down 6 percent from 2002. Yields on processing vegetable crops were virtually unchanged from 2002 levels. Production of processing vegetable crops totaled 113.7 thousand tons in 2003, down 6 percent from 2002. Prices received for the major processing vegetable crops were down from 2002. The value of production at $21.5 million in 2003 was down 6 percent from 2002. Harvest of vegetables during 2003 ran later than normal as growers had to wait for fields to dry.