

Delaware Growing Season Summary: 2004

WEATHER

The fall of 2003 was favorable for producers to complete their seeding of the winter wheat and barley crops in a timely manner. Adequate moisture was received after planting for excellent germination and early growth before the small grain crops went dormant for the winter.

The 2004 growing season can best be described as "near ideal". Although April precipitation was well above normal, there were enough dry periods for farmers to till land and get some acreage planted. May was an ideal month with enough precipitation to germinate crops planted in April and May while extended dry periods allowed operators to complete plantings of corn and single crop soybeans and harvest wheat and barley. Unlike 2003, when excessive moisture hurt vegetable crops, the 2004 crop season weather was generally favorable for vegetable production.

The months of June through September had near average rainfall amounts. New Castle county had above average precipitation during these months and some local flooding occurred. It was the timeliness of the rains coupled with beneficial amounts (not too little – not too much) along with favorable temperatures which resulted in above average crop yields.

The weather during the fall harvest was also favorable as the month of October was fairly dry statewide allowing for good harvest progress to be made. Although precipitation was well above normal in November, there were enough dry periods to harvest most of the soybean acreage.

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. The development of the soybean crop ran about two weeks earlier than normal and approximately 95 percent of the crop had been harvested before entering the month of December.

Acres harvested increased 17 percent from 2003, from 178,000 to 208,000 acres. Yield was 42 bushels per acre, 6 bushels higher than in 2003 and the second highest yield ever achieved for soybeans in Delaware. Sussex county had a record high yield at 42.5 bushels. Production increased 36 percent from 2003, to 8.7 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."*) The season average price for soybeans in 2004 was \$5.25 per bushel, down from \$7.65 in 2003. The higher acreage and improved yield did not offset the decrease in price as the value of the crop decreased percent from 2003.

CORN acres harvested for grain in 2004 were down 6 percent from 2003. The 2004 growing season provided timely moisture with favorable temperatures, resulting in a 152 bushel yield. This was the second highest yield ever achieved for corn in Delaware. Yield per acre per acre was up 29 bushels from the 123 bushel yield in 2003. New Castle county had a record high yield at 145.8 bushels. Production for Delaware at 23.3 million bushels, was up 17 percent from 2003. Value of the corn for grain crop was \$48.8 million for 2004, down 15 percent from the previous year. There were 6,000 acres of corn harvested for silage in 2004, up 1,000 from the acreage harvested in 2003. The yield per acre at 17.0 tons was up 1.0 ton from 2003, resulting in production of 102,000 tons of corn silage. This was a 28 percent increase from 2003.

WHEAT seeding made adequate progress in the fall of 2003 due to favorable weather conditions which resulted from undelayed corn and soybean harvests. Adequate fall moisture was received for germination and good early growth. Maturity progress ran slightly ahead of normal. Harvest began the second week of June and ran into the first week of August. There were 47,000 acres of wheat harvested from the 50,000 acres planted, unchanged from 2003. Yield per acre at 58 bushels, was up 17 bushels per acre from 2003. Wheat production in 2004 at 2,726,000 bushels, was up 42 percent from 2003 due to the improved yield. The value of the wheat crop increased 39 percent from 2003 to \$8.3 million, due to the sharp increase in production.

BARLEY acres planted in 2004 at 29,000 was up 4,000 from 2003, while acreage harvested increased 5,000 from 2003 to 26,000 acres. The crop wintered over in good condition. Harvest got underway at the beginning of June and was completed about a week earlier than normal. Yield per acre increased 21 bushels from 2003 to 80 bushels per acre. The acreage increase coupled with the yield increase resulted in production of a 2,080,000 bushel crop, up 68 percent from 2003. Value of the crop increased 99 percent from a year earlier to \$4.0 million. The season average price received in 2004 was \$1.90 per bushel compared with \$1.60 in 2003. This barley price was the highest received since 1997.

VEGETABLES The growing conditions for vegetables during the 2004 crop year were generally favorable. The value of all vegetable production in 2003 was \$44.8 million, up 5 percent from the wet year of 2003.

While vegetables planted for fresh market utilization was down 860 acres from 2003, acreage harvested increased by 40 acres. There were 1,600 acres not harvested in 2003 due to excessive moisture compared with 700 acres not harvested in 2004. Total production of crops for the fresh market in 2004 was 218.9 million pounds, up 27 percent from 2003 while the value of fresh market vegetable production was \$24.8 million, up 16 percent. Acreage planted to processing vegetable crops in 2004 at 39,180 was unchanged from 2003 although sweet corn acreage under contract for processing was down 2,100 from 2003 and at 7,300 acres was the lowest acreage since the early 1990s. Vegetable acreage harvested for processing at 39,100 was up 50 acres from 2003. Yields on processing vegetable crops were average in 2004 with the exception of sweet corn yields being above average. Production of processing vegetable crops totaled 110.8 thousand tons in 2004, down 3 percent from 2003. Prices received for the major processing vegetable crops were mostly down from 2003. The value of production at \$20.0 million in 2004 was down 7 percent from 2003.