

1999 CROP HIGHLIGHTS

Favorable weather and soil conditions helped to get the 1999 Kentucky crop year off to a good start. Planting of corn and first crop soybeans went well and tobacco setting was nearly ideal. Early hay cuttings were also good. Dry conditions started

in late July and lasted through September. Yields of all crops were hurt by the dry, hot weather. Crops in Western Kentucky fared better as they received some limited rain during the growing season while Eastern Kentucky remained dry.

BURLEY TOBACCO

Kentucky burley tobacco production for 1999 totaled 380.1 million pounds, down 9 percent from 1998 and the smallest in 3 years. The smaller crop resulted from both a decrease in harvested acreage and lower yield. Harvested acreage at 210,000 was down 5,000 acres from 1998. The smaller acreage resulted from a reduction in effective quota. Yield per acre at 1,810 pounds was down 125 pounds from 1998. This was the lowest yield in 16 years. Barren County was the largest producing county in Kentucky for the fourth year in a row with 11.9 million pounds.

Weather in late March was mild and dry and farmers were actively seeding both float and conventional tobacco beds. By April 4 setting was 72 percent complete, ahead of the 51 percent for 1998 and the 55 percent for the 5 year average. About 74 percent of the tobacco plants came from floatbeds and greenhouses and 26 percent from conventional ground beds. Tobacco setting started the first week of May and continued at a good pace through June except when halted by dry soils. At setting time no disease problems were reported but there was some insect damage. By late June, setting of burley and dark tobacco was complete, ahead of 1998 and the five year average. Increased black shank and various insect problems were reported, with conditions worse in drier areas. There were little or no reports of blue mold. Tobacco going into July was in mostly good to fair condition, but during July hot weather and dry soils set in for the long run. Tobacco development continued to be ahead of the previous year and average. As of July 25, 53 percent of the burley crop was blooming and 27 percent had been

topped. This was ahead of the 39 and 18 percent respectively for 1998.

Hot dry weather continued in August. Blue mold was present but dry weather stopped the spread in most areas. By August 15, 22 percent of the burley crop had been cut, ahead of 1998 with 12 percent and the average of 10 percent. Dark tobacco was 23 percent cut. Black shank continued to be reported statewide while the severity of the disease was highly variable. Dry weather continued through the month except in some eastern areas where rain was received. Kentucky usually has rain in late August or early September that benefits tobacco growth but during 1999 there was none. Harvested tobacco was reported to have small leaves, low plant weights, and was drying down too fast in most barns and not curing. Tobacco cutting advanced at a very fast pace due to the early setting and hot summer.

By the end of September cutting of tobacco was nearing completion. Curing conditions during 1999 were less than ideal with a general lack of moisture, which is needed to bring hanging tobacco in and out of case prior to stripping. Rain was received statewide during the second week of October and this improved stripping conditions for a time. However, stripping was slowed again by the lack of moisture needed to bring the crop into order. Much of the tobacco marketed was light in color and poor in quality. Sales were disappointing as 42 percent of the 1999 crop was purchased by the stabilization pool compared to 12 percent the year before. Pool purchases included large quantities of good quality tobacco.

DARK TOBACCOS

Production of dark fired tobacco was down from 1998 while dark air production was up. Tobacco companies increased dark tobacco purchases directly from farmers.

Type 22, Eastern Dark Fire-cured production at 8.81 million pounds was down 1 percent from 1998 and the smallest crop in 6 years.

Type 23, Western Dark Fire-cured production at

9.21 million pounds was down 9 percent from 1998 and the smallest crop in 7 years.

Type 35, One Sucker Dark Air-cured production increased 21 percent from the previous year at 6.76 million pounds. This was the largest crop in 14 years.

Type 36, Green River Air-cured was up 20 percent at 3.62 million pounds and the largest crop in 5 years.

CORN

Corn for grain production was estimated at 123.9 million bushels, a decrease of 9 percent from 1998. Limited yields of 105 bushels per acre resulted from the hot, dry weather. This was down from 115 bushels in 1998. Early planted corn yielded the best. Harvested for grain acreage at 1.18 million acres was unchanged from 1998. An increased acreage was taken for silage due to low grain yields. Union County continued as the top producing grain county with a production of 11.0 million bushels.

Soil temperatures were warm in early April and corn planting got off to a good start. In mid-April planting slowed as soil temperatures turned cool and soils became wet. Farmers were concerned about ungerminated corn in the cold ground. Soil temperatures started to raise in late April and farmers were again actively planting corn. By May 2, farmers had planted 65 percent of their intended corn acreage compared to 35 percent in 1998 and 42 percent for the 5 year average. Some earlier planted corn had to be replanted in western Kentucky due to wet fields. Corn planting was nearly complete by May 30. Favorable weather and soil conditions that spring enabled farmers to plant their corn at a faster pace than in 1998 and average. Few disease problems were reported although army worms were reported by some growers. By mid-June some corn was starting to show stress due to the dry weather. Corn looked good going into July due to some rain received during June. The crop was 71 percent silked on July 11, ahead of the 39

percent in 1998. The crop was in mostly good to excellent condition and good yields were expected. Some Japanese beetle damage was experienced in western areas of the state. During July good corn yields were still expected despite potential problems due to lack of moisture and heat stress. In early August corn was under stress due to lack of moisture. As the month progressed drought conditions increased. Later planted corn was more severely stressed by the hot dry weather than earlier planted fields.

By mid-August harvest had begun for some early planted corn and yields were reported as mostly good to fair. Dry conditions continued the rapid drydown of the corn crop. Some producers chopped their corn for silage instead of shelling it for grain because of dry conditions, expected low corn prices, and shortage of forage for cattle. Harvest began in the western part of the State in late August with fair to good yields. By September 5, 36 percent of the corn crop had been harvested compared to 2 percent in 1998 and 1 percent for average. All corn had reached maturity as of September 26, ahead of 1998 and average. Some farmers rolled and baled corn residue to supplement the short hay crop. Corn harvest was virtually complete by October 31, ahead of 1998 and average. Earlier planted corn generally fared better than later planted corn. As harvest completion neared many farmers realized a better crop had been harvested than anticipated earlier in the year.

SOYBEANS

Soybean production was estimated at 24.2 million bushels for 1999, a decrease of 33 percent from 1998. Yields were estimated at 21.0 bushels per acre, down 9 bushels per acre from 1998. This was the lowest yield in 16 years. Bean quality was also down. Planting of spring first crop beans progressed well, but dry conditions started in late July for the newly planted double crop soybeans. Double crop soybeans follow the wheat and barley harvest. These beans had tough going from the start in 1999 due to dry soils. Some second crop soybeans yielded only 5 bushels or less per acre. Harvested acreage at 1.15 million acres was down 4 percent from 1998. Acreage not harvested for beans was bushhogged, plowed down or harvested for hay. Union County was the leading county in soybean production with 2.56 million bushels.

Planting of single crop soybeans started the second week of May. Planting activity increased as corn planting wound down. There were some germination problems due to dry soil conditions. As of May 30, 65 percent of the intended acreage had been planted compared to 34 percent in 1998 and 29 percent for the 5 year average. Planting of single crop soybeans continued through the end of June. Planting of double crop soybeans following the small grain (winter wheat and barley) harvest started about mid-June and continued into early July.

Japanese beetles were a problem in soybeans as well as corn.

With the advent of very dry conditions in early August some early planted soybeans began to drop blooms and limit pod fill. Late planted soybeans were under greater stress and some were very short in height. Some had yet to emerge through the wheat stubble. Beans were needing significant rainfall to get a good pod fill. With drought conditions continuing through August, pod and bean fill suffered due to lack of moisture. Condition of the crop as of September 10 rated only 38 percent fair or better. Some soybeans were not harvested for beans but were instead cut for hay.

Harvesting of soybeans started in mid-September and by September 26, 24 percent of the crop had been harvested. This compared to 9 percent in 1998 and 4 percent for average. Widely scattered rain was received in early October but this was too late for all except some late planted soybeans. Early planted soybean yields were slightly below average while second crop soybean yields were severely hurt. The summer's drought hit double crop soybeans particularly hard as they were blooming and setting pods. Some second crop acres were cut for forage and other acres were abandoned.

OTHER CROPS

Farmers in Kentucky produced 24.6 million bushels of winter wheat, down slightly from the 1998 crop of 24.8 million bushels. Yield per acre at 60 bushels was up 15 bushels from 1998 and ties the record yield set in 1994. Logan County continued as the leading wheat production county with 3.08 million bushels

A relatively mild winter helped keep the winter wheat crop in mostly good to excellent condition with little damage to the crop. By May 9, 82 percent of the crop was headed or heading out. The crop was in mostly good to excellent condition. Only scattered disease and lodging has been reported. Some wheat was harvested for hay and some for silage due to the low anticipated wheat price at harvest.

Drier conditions in May and June combined with adequate soil moisture to produce a good yielding

wheat crop. Harvest was completed by mid-July with very good yields and test weights.

Alfalfa hay production was estimated at 725,000 tons, down 17 percent from 1998 and the lowest production in 16 years. All other hay production at 4.09 million tons was down 15 percent from 1998. Hart County was the leading producer of alfalfa hay while Barren was the leading producer of all other hay.

Alfalfa and other hays came through the winter with minimal winter damage. First cutting alfalfa hay in May had good yield and quality. The dry summer limited the hay harvest. Due to the dry weather, farmers increased their harvested acres of all other hay and cut an additional 50,000 acres of hay to fill their needs for livestock feed.