

Crops review



general... Severe drought prevailed throughout the 2007 crop year. Although the year began with cool temperatures and abundant precipitation, dry conditions set in during May and remained throughout the growing season. Hot, dry

weather sapped moisture from the soil by early June, browning pastures, causing corn to curl, and impeding soybean planting in the hard ground. At season's end, precipitation ranged from just 52% of normal in western Maryland to 77% of normal on the Eastern Shore, with near record-low stream flows reported in some areas. This drought was felt throughout the Mid-Atlantic and southeastern U.S., yet the rest of the country enjoyed ideal growing conditions.

corn... Corn was the crop of interest in 2007, due to a sudden spike in demand and skyrocketing price. The U.S. produced the largest corn crop on record, as producers harvested the largest corn acreage since 1933 with the second highest yield on record. Maryland farmers followed the national trend and planted 540,000 acres of corn, up 10% from 2006 and the largest corn acreage planted since 1992. Drought conditions here, however, led many producers to cut their crop for silage or even abandon it, leaving 455,000 acres harvested for grain. Yields were down significantly, dropping from an average 142 bushels per acre in 2006 to 103 bushels per acre in 2007. Total corn production was estimated at 46.9 million bushels, down 22 percent from 2006 despite the increased acreage. Production of corn silage was estimated at 900,000 tons, down 12% from 2006. Although acreage harvested for silage increased from 60,000 acres in 2006 to 75,000 acres in 2007, average yield was estimated at only 12 tons per acre, the lowest since the drought of 2002, when 12 tons per acre was also recorded.

hay... was harvested from an estimated 215,000 acres in 2007, up 10,000 acres from 2006. Despite the increased acreage, drought conditions impacted the hay crop severely. Hay production plummeted from 569,000 tons in 2006 to 462,000 tons in 2007, the lowest hay production since 1936. By the time of the second hay cutting, farmers reported reduced yields, and conditions continued to worsen. The average yield for alfalfa in 2007 was estimated at 2.8 tons per acre, the lowest since 1999 when the average alfalfa yield was also 2.8 tons per acre. With 40,000 acres of alfalfa harvested, total production was estimated at 112,000 tons, the lowest production of alfalfa hay in Maryland since 1947. The average yield of all other types of hay was estimated at 2.0 tons per acre, the lowest since 2001, when yield for all other types of hay was also 2.0 tons per acre. With 175,000 acres harvested, total production of all other types of hay was estimated at 350,000 tons.

small grains... Maryland's small grain crop was mostly mature by the time the drought set in, and as a result, small grain production was reasonably good. Good yields coupled with a surge in acres planted resulted in total production of 11.6 million bushels of wheat, the highest since 2000, when 12.6 million bushels of wheat were produced in Maryland. Growers increased their plantings of wheat to 220,000 acres in 2007 due to participation in Maryland's Cover Crop program, and harvested 170,000 acres for grain. The remaining acreage was used as forage or abandoned as part of the Cover Crop program. Growers reported an average yield for wheat of 68 bushels per acre, the same as 2006. Producers also harvested 34,000 acres of barley in 2007, up slightly from 32,000 acres harvested in 2006. Average yield for barley was estimated at 84 bushels per acre, down slightly from 87 bushels per acre.

soybeans... As acreage shifted to corn, there was a corresponding decrease in the area planted to soybeans. Maryland farmers planted 400,000 acres of soybeans in 2007, down 70,000 acres from 2006. The soybean crop was challenged from the start, as dry, hard soils impeded planting and lack of rain reduced plant growth and pod fill. Double cropped soybeans were able to take advantage of some rain in the fall, bumping the average yield for soybeans to 27 bushels per acre. Although higher than expected, this yield was down 20 percent from the 34 bushels per acre recorded in 2006, and the lowest since 2002 when an average 23 bushels per acre was recorded. Total soybean production was estimated at 10.3 million bushels, the lowest since 1987, when Maryland growers produced 9.2 million bushels of soybeans.