

2003 CROP HIGHLIGHTS

Kentucky farmers had banner crop growing conditions in 2003. Production of soybeans and corn was very good. Tobacco production was fair to good. The 2003 crop year could be

characterized as a wet one with delayed crop planting and tobacco setting that ended in good to excellent corn and soybean yields.

BURLEY TOBACCO

Kentucky farmers produced 198.3 million pounds of **burley** tobacco. This was up less than 1 percent from the 2002 crop. Harvested acreage was estimated at 103,000 acres, unchanged from 2002 and a record low. Yield per acre was estimated at 1,925 pounds, up 10 pounds from the 2002 crop. Bourbon County was the leading production county with 6.41 million pounds. For 2003, 16 counties had production of 3.50 million pounds and more.

Farmers actively sowed their plant beds and greenhouses in late March and early April and were virtually complete by late April. For 2003, farmers produced 88 percent of their home-grown transplants in greenhouses and float beds with only 12 percent in traditional beds. Burley and dark tobacco setting started in early May. Setting was slowed by frequent rain and by mid-May farmers had started mowing tobacco plants due to excessive height and the inability to set plants. Planting continued in June at a pace slowed by frequent rain and wet soil conditions. Some plants were drowned and washed out and had to be replanted. Some disease and insect problems appeared due to the continued wet weather. Tobacco setting was finally complete by month's end. Even with the late setting, the State's tobacco crop was in good condition going into July.

In early July there was concern due to black shank and a few reports of blue mold. In mid-July a major concern was late set plants blooming before putting on much height. As of July 20th, 21 percent of the burley crop was blooming with 6 percent topped, both behind the 2002 crop and the

5-year average. Dark tobacco acreage was 36 percent blooming. In late July some tobacco was blown down by high winds and heavy rains. Continued wet weather in early August caused some blue mold problems in eastern Kentucky fields and some localized black shank problems were reported. Blue mold damage was highly variable, from light to heavy. Less rain and higher temperatures were needed to slow the progress of the disease. By August 17th, 9 percent of the burley crop had been cut along with 8 percent of the dark tobacco. With the start of September, 35 percent of the burley and 29 percent of the dark tobacco had been cut and housed. Housed tobacco was curing well. As early tobacco was being cut, later set tobacco was being topped and sprayed for suckers and insects. During mid-September housed tobacco was in fair to good condition with some houseburn noted. Rain during late September hampered cutting and delayed housing of some cut tobacco in the field, but was beneficial to curing.

Harvesting of burley was virtually complete the first week of October. Tobacco stripping started in early October with housed tobacco in mostly good to fair condition. Farmers reported good to excellent quality and weight. Even with blue mold and black shank experienced during the season, damage to the crop varied on a field to field and farm to farm basis. Burley tobacco was sold by two methods, auction market and direct contract. Average price received for burley was 198.2 cents per pound, up .2 cents from the 2002 crop. This was a record high price.

DARK TOBACCOS

Production of all four types of dark tobacco was up from the 2002 crop. The increase in production was brought about by larger harvested acreage. Price for all four types was up from the 2002 crop. Producers sold the majority of their crops at the farm without taking it to the auction market.

Type 22, Eastern Dark Fire-cured production at 8.01 million pounds was up 3 percent from 2002.

Type 23, Western Dark Fire-cured production at 8.83 million pounds was up less than 1 percent from 2002.

Type 35, One Sucker Dark Air-cured production totaled 6.51 million pounds, an increase of 3 percent from the 2002 crop.

Type 36, Green River Dark Air-cured production at 3.43 million pounds was up 16 percent from 2002.

CORN

Corn for grain production was estimated at 148.0 million bushels, up 39 percent from the 2002 drought reduced crops. Yield was estimated at 137 bushels per acre, up 35 bushels from 2002 and the second highest yield on record. Acreage harvested for grain averaged 1.08 million acres, up 40,000 acres from the 2002 crop. Christian County was the leading corn production county with 10.6 million bushels.

Favorable soil temperatures and moisture got corn planting off to a good start in early April with 22 percent planted by April 13. By May 4, 70 percent of the intended corn acreage had been planted even with frequent rain and cool soil temperatures. This was ahead of 46 percent for the 2002 crop and 61 percent for the 5-year average.

Rain during May slowed corn planting. By June 1, 86 percent of the corn had been planted, ahead of the 2002 crop while behind the 5-year average. Planting was completed by mid-June. Some flooded corn fields were replanted numerous times and in some cases' farmers never got their corn planted. Frequent rain made weed control difficult. By early July farmers had mixed opinions regarding corn condition. Some farmers had a very good crop while for others their corn

had been hurt by excessive moisture. Most farmers were optimistic about potential yields if rainfall remained adequate.

By August 3, corn was 88 percent in the silked stage, 64 percent milk stage and 42 percent dough stage. All development stages were behind the 2002 crop and 5-year average, Most farmers were optimistic about the crop. During August the crop continued to develop well in spite of being behind last year and the 5-year average.

By late August farmers had started to harvest their early corn but harvest was slowed by rain as farmers waited for the corn to dry down naturally prior to harvesting. On August 31, 5 percent of the corn acreage had been harvested compared to 18 percent for the 2002 crop and 12 percent for average. Harvesting in October accelerated as dry, warm weather reduced the moisture content of the mature corn. Early reports continued to indicate an overall above average crop with some farmers predicting record yields. Harvesting of the crop continued through October and was finally complete in early November. Farmers had harvested a good quality crop with good to excellent yields. Many producers reported excellent yields ranging from 130 to 150 bushels per acre.

SOYBEANS

Soybean production was estimated at 53.3 million bushels, an increase of 28 percent from 2002's small crop and the second largest crop on record. The largest crop, 54.0 million bushels occurred in 1979. Yield per acre was estimated at 43 bushels per acre, a record high. Harvested acreage was estimated at 1.24 million acres, down 20,000 acres from 2002. Daviess County was the leading production county with 3.62 million bushels.

Planting of soybeans started in late April and was slowed by rain during May. On June 1 only 23 percent had been planted, the same as in 2002 while down from the 5-year average of 52 percent. The soybean crop was one to two weeks behind normal. Planting continued during June and by late month farmers were planting their remaining single crop soybeans as they were starting to plant their double crop soybeans following the wheat harvest. Planting of second crop soybeans finished the second week of July. Growing conditions were

good during July with adequate soil moisture and favorable temperatures.

As of August 3, 57 percent of the soybeans were blooming and 19 percent were setting pods, behind 2002 and the 5-year average. During August soil moisture dried at times but timely rains improved growing conditions. As of September 7, 93 percent of the soybeans were setting pods, 12 percent had leaves turning yellow and 3 percent were shedding leaves. Rain received during mid-September aided double crop beans in filling seed pods. Disease was present in some fields but overall was not a problem. When harvest of full season soybeans started in late September there was some concern about double crop soybeans maturing before frost. Farmers reported good to excellent yields in the 30 to 60 bushel range with little frost damage to late maturing beans. Good late summer soil moisture helped fill second crop bean pods.

OTHER CROPS

Kentucky farmers produced 20.5 million bushels of **winter wheat**, up 2.44 million bushels from the 2002 crop. Yield per acre at 62 bushels was up nine bushels from 2002. Reports of winter damage were minimal even with a colder than normal winter. On May 4, 50 percent of the crop was headed. As wet weather continued in May farmers continued to report grain lodging and disease problems. Wheat harvest began the first week of June. During the harvest season yields and test weights declined due to the delayed harvest and wet conditions. Yields were better than previously expected though there was some docking by buyers due to the presence of head scab. Harvesting was complete by mid-July.

Alfalfa hay production totaled 875,000 tons, down 25,000 tons from 2002. Yield per acre was

estimated at 3.5 tons per acre, with harvested acreage of 250,000 acres. **Other hay** production was estimated at 5.50 million acres, up 19 percent from 2002 and a record high production. The record crop resulted from a record high yield (2.5 tons per acre) and record tying high harvested acreage (2.20 million acres).

Many farmers were unable to harvest their hay during the spring due to excess moisture. Quality suffered due to delayed harvesting and cut hay being rained on. During drier periods of the summer farmers made hay whenever the weather permitted. Farmers continued to harvest hay through mid-September. Production was good but quality was hurt due to frequent to steady rains that prevented timely harvesting.