1980 Was Good Year To Forget For Most Farmers In Acadiana

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Flooding, followed by a summer-long drought and interest rates almost as high as the temperature, made 1980 a year to be forgotten for most local farmers.

And 1981 will be remembered as the year they struggled to get out of debt from 1980.

Agriculture might not play as significant a role as oil in the total economic picture of Lafayette Parish but it is important.

Almost 70,000 acres were planted in crops, 52,000 of it in soybeans. More than 8,000 acres was in rice, 3,000 in sugarcane and the rest in corn, wheat and grain sorghum.

Farmers saw the value of their land rise again in 1980 as the city continued its growth.

So to what was once open country.

Soybean farmers got a taste of what it’s like to play the big markets when a special marketing seminar was held here. Some who didn’t learn the biggest lesson of the seminar — to avoid the temptation to keep holding their goods for a higher market — are still trying to sell crops. Prices were high but later dropped.

Reports of the type of year rice farmers had vary. Some say the drought caused extensive damage but others say the prices more than took care of any losses.

Sugarcane farmers, though, enjoyed a good year, according to the Louisiana Farm Bureau Federation, because of better prices paid for raw sugar. Prices were almost twice what they were paid in 1979 but most of the increase was taken up by a 20 percent hike in production cost.

Losses due to the elements forced many farmers to turn to loan programs for aid. Those who suffered more than 20 percent losses and could not get loans elsewhere applied for low-interest government loans. Many of those loan applications are still being processed.

Total farm debt statewide is predicted to have risen 15 percent in 1980 and will rise by the same amount next year, state officials say.

Conservation plays an important role in Lafayette Parish farming. Farmers are trying to make the most of what land they have available.

More than 100 farmers participated in the Agriculture Stabilization and Conservation Service’s regular conservation program and a special project was started last year to halt erosion of topsoil.