The 1992 Louisiana rice season had a substantial increase of acreage, variable statewide yields and lower market prices, according to Paul Seilhan, rice program coordinator with the Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service.

"These results have farmers anxiously awaiting 1993 farm program provision announcements before deciding strategies for next year's crop," Seilhan said.

In a survey of county agents in 30 rice-growing parishes, information on this year's crop was gathered on acreage by variety, acreage in conservation tillage systems and acreage in second-crop, or ratoon, production. Ratoon is a second growth from rice plant stubble.

Acreage increased by nearly 100,000 acres, Seilhan reported. The recently harvested crop totaled 611,093 acres, compared with 515,250 acres in 1991. Twenty-three of the 30 rice parishes reported acreage increases, the largest in rice production since the 670,000 acres of 1981.

Seilhan credited the increase to more favorable planting conditions in early spring along with a favorable government rice program.

Acreage planted to long-grain rice increased to 445,330 acres, representing 72.9 percent of the total state acreage, according to the extension service. In terms of acres planted, Lemont continued to be the most popular variety, planted to some 181,200 acres, or 29.7 percent of the state acreage. However, acreage planted to Maybelle, an early maturing long-grain variety, nearly doubled with 117,453 acres in 1992.

Good main crop yield and excellent ratoon, or second crop, production potential were the main reasons for the increase in Maybelle acreage, Seilhan said.

Acreage in medium-grain varieties declined to 165,763 acres, representing 27.1 percent of the total acres. Mars was the most popular variety, planted to 87,181 acres or 15.9 percent of the total acreage. Second-most popular medium grain variety, Rico 1, was planted to 53,199 acres or 8.7 percent of state acreage.

Other medium-grain varieties — Saturn, Mercury, Orion, Bengal and V4716 — were planted to 15,463 acres or 2.5 percent of the state acreage.

The survey of the county agents showed 137,100 acres were re-flooded for a second or ratoon crop. The second crop is produced from regrowth of the initial or main crop stubble.

Seilhan said parishes in the southwest and central part of the state usually are able to harvest by mid-August, which leaves time to produce a second crop before cool weather sets in. Eleven parishes reported acreage in second-crop production, an increase of 7,000 acres over 1991.

"Much of the increase in conservation tillage systems can be attributed to the increasing popularity of conservation tillage in a variety of crop production systems and the on-going special water quality improvement project involving the Bayou Queue de Tortue Hydrologic Unit located in Vermilion, Acadia and Lafayette Parishes," Seilhan said.

With main crop harvest completed, and second-crop harvest nearing completion, he said the 1992 season provided a mixed bag of yields.

Seilhan said reports from south Louisiana showed yield reduction of several hundred pounds an acre were not uncommon. However, north Louisiana yield reports were good, with some reports of fields averaging 7,000 to 8,000 pounds an acre. Second-crop yields are expected to average about 1,150 pounds an acre.

Current estimates show average per-acre yield for the state to be 4,700 pounds, a decrease of 100 pounds an acre from 1991.

"It is evident that increase in disease incidence and severity, especially blast, untimely rains during peak pollination periods and an increase in weed pressure played a major role in the reduction of yields, primarily in the southern rice-producing parishes," Seilhan said.

He said farmers are getting lower prices for this year's crop than in 1991. U.S. farm-level rice prices are projected to range between $6.50 and $7.00 per hundredweight this year. However, August prices averaged $6.61 per hundredweight, September $6.40 per hundredweight, and the October preliminary was $6.44 per hundredweight, Seilhan said.