Agriculture Today: Record yields against all odds

By BOB ODOM
Commissioner

Louisiana farmers in 1984 produced record or near record yields in seven of the state's nine largest crops, according to the Crop and Livestock Reporting Service.

"This was a year when many farmers enjoyed several months of excellent growing conditions at critical points in the season," according to Commissioner of Agriculture Bob Odom. "But there were also several severe wet and cold periods which cut into the potential for an across-the-board record year," Odom added.

Although total acres-planted figures were not necessarily records, all-time-high yields per acre were posted in cotton, corn, sorghum, sweet potatoes and hay. Near records were reached by rice and wheat.

"Record yields did not mean record earnings for farmers, however," Odom said. "The price per unit in 1984 was down from 1983 prices in six of the nine crops." Soybeans, he pointed out, which is Louisiana's largest crop, went from an average of $7.77 per bushel in 1983 to $6.20 a bushel in 1984. Some 2.6 million acres of soybeans were harvested in 1984 compared to a total of 2.5 million acres for Louisiana's other eight largest commodities.

A brief outline of 1984 production shows:

COTTON: When the late ginnings, caused by wet conditions during harvest, were in 1,045,000 million bales of cotton were harvested from 645,000 acres, up from the 900,000 bale record in 1979. Yield per acre averaged 727 pounds compared to 712 pounds in 1979. The rains during harvest caused a drop in the quality of the crop which was valued at $316 million.

RICE: The 528,000 acres of rice harvested came in at 4,150 pounds per acre, up from the 900,000 bale record in 1979. Yield per acre averaged 727 pounds compared to 712 pounds in 1979. The rains during harvest caused a drop in the quality of the crop which was valued at $316 million.

SUGARCANE: The severe freeze at the beginning of 1984 caused major damage to the sugarcane crop. Sugar and seed production totaled five million tons, down from the 6.3 million tons in 1983. Crop value, produced on 230,000 acres, has not yet been computed. The 1983 crop was valued at $161.00 million.

WHEAT: The $46 million crop produced on 320,000 acres was, at 41 bushels per acre, one bushel shy of the previous state record set in 1981 and 11 bushels better than 1983. Thirteen million bushels were harvested.

GRAIN SORGHUM: Used as animal feed, 65 bushels per acre was a record yield in sorghum produced on 269,000 acres in 1984. The previous record was 56 bushels per acre. The value of the crop is estimated at $47 million. The price per bushel was down 28 cents from 1983, to $2.69 a bushel.

CORN: Yield averaged a record 115 bushels per acre and generally poor quality as a result of the harvest rains. Production was also off slightly down to 64 million bushels in 1984 compared to 68 million in 1983. The $33 million crop sold at an average of $3.46 per bushel, down 15 cents below the 1983 price.

SWEET POTATOES: The state's largest vegetable crop, a record 106 hundredweight per acre were harvested from 23,000 acres. The crop is valued at $18 million compared to $16 million in 1983. Price per hundredweight increased from $7.65 in 1983 to $7.50 in 1984.

HAY: Harvested from 340,000 acres in 1984, the yield per acre was a record 2.4 tons compared with a 2.1 yield in 1983. The crop is valued at $44 million, up 18 percent from the 1983 figure.