DROWN ON
THE FARM

Heavy Rain Hasn't Helped
Acadiana Farmers, But Hasn't
Hurt That Much. Yet.

The rains that have deluged Acadiana recently have been
inconvenient for most people, but for farmers the
consequences are substantial. Thus far, though, agricul-
tural interests in South Louisiana have not been plagued
as severely as their counterparts in the northern section
of the state.

The rains that began April 12 have been intermittent since
then. Lafayette Parish normally records an 18-
inch average rainfall by
the first of May. This year,
the total was 30 inches, and more rain has fallen
since then.

Most crops have
suffered some ill effects
from the extra moisture,
but none have been
critically damaged. The
following
is
a summary of
how each has fared
through this rainy season.

RICE:
The nature of the crop
dictates that it can tolerate
water better than many
other plants. "There's
really no dramatic effect on
the rice. The rice crop
looks real good. This is
not affecting it to any
great degree," says
 Vermilion county agent Howard Cormier. "The water has been
able to drain off of the rice."

Dr. Gene Johnson, with the Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service, says rice in

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BY MARCELLE TESSIER

SUGARCANE:
To date, most of the crop looks very promising, but here
again, rain has kept farmers from fertilizing and applying
herbicides to battle weeds. "It's a minor problem right now,
but if we don't get dry weather it could be a major problem,"
says St. Martin county agent James Devillier. "A lot of
fellows have not fertilized their cane, and it's getting past the
optimum time."

"Our concern right now is that it's going to further delay
getting back in the field," says James Abadie, county agent in
Iberia Parish. Alternative methods of fertilizing and herbicide
application could be used, he says, but they would not be as
effective.

Aside from this aggravation, sugarcane farmers are
hopeful. "Other than that, we still have prospects for a good
crop," says Devillier. "If we get two weeks of dry weather,
everything will be back in good shape."

"We have a good crop out there. With just a
little bit of luck, we'll bring in a real good crop."

WINTER WHEAT:
Though a small crop in terms of acreage, wheat has been
most adversely affected
by the rains, which have
postponed harvesting.
"It's a relatively minor
crop, but it's a crop that
worked well in rotation
with soybeans," says

Cormier. "The wheat
crop is being affected to
a pretty large degree
because the farmers
can't get in the fields to
harvest."

Acadiana wheat is
usually cut in early May,
and the longer it stays in the field, the lower the yields
become due to sprouting, mold and

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mildew. "We're starting to get late," Cormier says. "It is certainly going to mean some very severe discounts," Johnson says. "For those farmers that have the wheat, it's a big concern for them. They can't get anything done. It's very frustrating."

Vermilion Parish currently has 5,000 acres of wheat, but the crop has been growing in popularity, according to Cormier. This trend may reverse itself after this season, due in part to the harvesting problems. "We thought we'd have an excellent crop this year," Cormier says. "They're not excited about wheat this year."

**SOYBEANS:**

Dry conditions are needed to plant soybeans, so some farmers have been delayed in getting started. Normally, more of the crop would be in the ground at this time of year.

"Soybeans are not severely affected yet. Many farmers are waiting and ready to begin planting," says Cormier. "It's going to put more pressure on the farmer to put the beans in the ground before June."

The general rule of thumb is that if planting occurs after June 15, decreased yields of a half bushel per acre per day can be expected. "Those that were going to plant soybeans a little early, they won't be able to get in the fields now," says Johnson.

**CRAWFISH:**

The best speculation is that the extra rainfall ultimately will help crawfish production in the Atchafalaya Basin, but not immediately or drastically. "[It] has picked up somewhat, but it's not picked up a great, great deal," says Tom Hymel, with the extension service for Iberia/St. Martin. "Production is expected to increase as water levels stabilize," he says. "Harvest levels pick up as the water comes down. Right now they're as diffuse as they're going to be. They will be more concentrated when the water is going down."

As with most crawfish matters, predictions are mere guesswork. No one knows for sure when the waters will recede. "It looks like a decline now. How gradual or how fast will depend on the rainfall upstream," says Hymel.

Pond production is gradually nearing the end of its season, so Basin catches become more meaningful to the industry at this time of year. "The pond production is on the decline and hopefully the Basin production will increase to extend the season a little bit more," says Hymel.

**MILO (GRAIN SORGHUM):**

While this crop is small and relatively new to the area, it may be almost nonexistent this year due to heavy rains. Dry weather conditions are needed for cultivation, and the favorable planting period, from April 1 through May 1, has already passed.

Only several hundred acres have been planted in Vermilion Parish, according to Cormier, and he doesn't expect any additional planting. "They will not be able to plant," he says. Farmers were hoping for several thousand acres to be harvested, but it appears that only one-tenth of that amount will reach maturity.