Herman Reed tries to save enough sugarcane for next season's planting in this field near Bunkie. A December freeze severely damaged much of this year's cane.

Reaping and sowing
La. farmers continue rhythm of seasons

By DICK WRIGHT
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In Louisiana the seasons for planting and gathering overlap. In spring the warm weather crops are planted while the winter and cool weather crops are ripening or nearing maturity.

Thus it is that corn farmers in Avoyelles Parish are seeding their land, strawberry farmers in Tangipahoa Parish are picking their crop.

While sweet potato farmers have buried their seed tubers in beds to produce the slips, or tender young plants, that will be transplanted into the fields, wheat growers are watching their crop set heads of grain. They will cut wheat in May and June. The wheat was planted last fall. And following the wheat harvest, while vegetable farmers are hailing produce to market, wheat farmers may be rescoring their fields with soybeans.

Vegetable farmers set out sweet peppers as early as they can and gamble a freeze won't make their labors futile.

Judging from a survey of planting intentions, done annually by a federal agency, Louisiana farmers appear optimistic about the coming year in most crops. They indicate they will plant more than they did last year.

At the same time, however, sugar farmers, who have enjoyed two years of outstanding harvests, are looking at fields that aren't greening with new growth the way they should be as days and nights warm. Early indications are that sugarcane, dormant in the cold months, was badly damaged in the ground by the freeze that hit the state around Christmas, sending south Louisiana temperatures below 10 degrees.

Farmers in some crops indicate plantings of record or near record acreage.

In cotton, for example, the federal Agricultural Statistics Service found Louisiana cotton growers eyeing some 780,000 acres this year, an increase of 21 percent, or more than 100,000 acres over that planted and harvested last year.

If the farmers actually plant their stated intentions, 1990 will see the most cotton planted in Louisiana since 1933 when the state had 1,020,000 acres, according to the statistics service.

Corno farmers indicated they will plant 190,000 acres this year, 27 percent more than they planted in 1989.

The statistics service surveyed farmers in March on their planting intentions in major crops. Weather and a

Joe Liuzzo cultivates his fields of growing cabbage near Independence.
Vegetable farmer Joe Liuzza with bell peppers.

Sweet potato tuber sprouts become 'slips' for transplanting.

Cluster of strawberries awaits picking in Tangipahoa Parish field.

Wheat, to be harvested by summer, greens a field near Bunkie.

Corn makes green stripes against brown earth in Avoyelles Parish.
change in plans affect the acreage actually planted. In addition, 1990 planting intentions are compared with what farmers actually planted in 1989. However, planted acres may not equate with 1989's harvested acres because drought, wet weather or other reasons may have ruined some of the crop.

Farmers, for example, indicate they intend to plant 1.9 million acres of soybeans this year. Last year they planted about 1.8 million acres; but harvested only 1.6 million acres, the loss blamed on bad weather.

Sweet potato farmers indicated they will hike their acreage by 2,000, to 21,000 acres in 1990. The survey found plans to boost rice acreage by 9 percent, to 550,000 acres, and grain sorghum acreage by 36 percent, to 150,000 acres.

Wheat growers planted about 470,000 acres last fall — the second highest acreage for the state — and 21 percent over the previous year. As of April 1, a statistics service survey found the condition of wheat to be fair or better. None was reported poor or very poor.