Parish farming: ‘Nothing to write home about’

By J. AUBREY MIRE
Parish County Agent

This year in Evangeline Parish agriculture has not been a year to write home about. Farmers continue to struggle with high cost of production, lower yields, and softer prices for most commodities. Weather like it has so many times dominated this year’s agricultural picture and the resulting yields for rice and soybeans are a direct reflection.

Fortunately, for Evangeline Parish, our agriculture is highly diversified and had it not been for good prices received for sweet potatoes and beef cattle we would have experienced a much leaner year.

Income Shows Weak Gain

Farm income in Evangeline Parish went up only by $359,494 over 1988. The total gross value of agricultural products this year stands at $72,514,183.

Even though income from rice plummeted by $4,570,796 in comparison to last season, it continued to record the greatest income and led the way with an estimated crop value of $21,619,126. The unusually wet weather in May, June, and July apparently took its toll on yield as farmers reported many blank seeds at harvest.

Tropical storm Allison and subsequent heavy rains which lingered for days caused rice to pollinate very poorly. In addition, the extreme hot and humid weather served as a breeding ground to further the spread of sheath blight to reduce yields even more in many long grain varieties.

Perhaps the most dramatic news about parish agricultural income is the sweet potato price spiral. Sweet potatoes replaced soybeans as the second top money crop for parish farmers. Sweet potato income shot up to $19,832,000, an increase of $7,325,750 over the 1988 crop. It should be noted that there was an increase in acreage, price and yield over last season.

Gloomiest Report on Soybeans

The gloomiest report came from soybeans as producers took it on the chin to the tune of $4,506,896. The total estimated income from soybeans this year was $19,328,006. Compared to $14,834,902 in 1988, this is a devastating loss. Soybean yields varied greatly from field to field throughout the parish. Some growers harvested good crops in one field and another field experienced almost a total wipeout.

The one overbearing factor, moisture, has more to do with soybean yields than any other.

Income from beef cattle took a moderate increase for the third consecutive year to $8,532,436, an increase of $814,406 over last year’s $7,718,030, reflecting continued strong prices received for cattle and calves.

Income from forestry remains in fifth place like it has for many years and held steady with a gross estimated value of $3,000,000.

Wheat acreage has increased from 7,726 acres in 1988 to 9,704 acres in 1989. Prices received for a bushel of wheat in 1989 was approximately 40¢ more per bushel than the previous year. The average price received for a bushel of wheat this year was $3.65. Gross income from wheat went to $1,558,462, an increase of $378,315 over the last crop.

Income from other agricultural commodities in Evangeline Parish which are hay, crawfish, home gardens, corn, horses, oats, grain sorghum, dairy, sheep, swine, nurseries, cotton, poultry, wool and commercial vegetables accounted for an estimated $7,720,607, an increase of $2,207,725 over 1988.

The following agricultural and agribusinesses have contributed information to help with the completion of this report: Basile Rice Drier, Mamou Rice Drier, Ville Platte Rice Drier, Farm Bureau, ASCS, SCS, FmHA, Forestry Commission, American Security Bank, Citizen’s Bank, Evangeline Bank, Guaranty Bank of Mamou, Basile State Bank and numerous individual farmers. Without their assistance and support the report could not have been accomplished.