State farmers to plant more acreage

Louisiana farmers, who enjoyed one of their most productive years in 1987, indicate they intend to plant more of nearly all the state's major crops this year, according to an early-season survey.

The farmers indicated plans to plant more soybeans, cotton, rice and sweet potatoes this year.

Only corn acreage intentions were on the minus side in the survey. Grain sorghum acreage prospects match last year's acreage.

A total 1,400 farmers were surveyed on their 1988 planting intentions March 1-15, said Bergen Nelson, state statistician with the Louisiana Agricultural Statistic Service.

Actual acres planted may not equate with the stated intentions, Nelson said. In fact, when farmers see the figures for a particular crop they may change their plans, he said.

A survey to determine the actual numbers of acres planted in the various crops will be conducted June 1-15, he said.

The March survey showed farmers intending to plant 1.9 million acres of soybeans, which would be 15 percent over the 1987 acreage. Cotton farmers indicated they will plant 770,000 acres, or 27 percent more than in 1987.

Rice growers indicated they will plant 525,000 acres, 24 percent more than last year. And sweet potatoes farmers indicated they will plant 21,000 acres, up 5 percent.

But when it came to corn, growers indicated only 160,000 acres, or 29 percent less than last year's acreage. Growers indicated they will have 190,000 acres of grain sorghum, unchanged from 1987.

Corn is a relatively new cash crop for many Louisiana growers in recent years, which means they have not built up the required acreage base to qualify for government price subsidies. In addition, the state's ethanol fuel subsidy program, which boosted the price paid to corn farmers, is defunct.

Sugarcane does not figure in the survey conducted in March.

Cane is planted on a different schedule from most row crops, but Don Fontenot, Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service specialist, said 300,000 acres or more for harvest and seed probably is being grown this year. A survey later in the year will give a more nearly accurate account, he said.

Sugarcane acreage was 264,000 acres in 1987, with 265,000 of that being for harvest, he said.