dg-CountyYields w/ state map graphic

County yield estimates reflect 2019 challenges, variability

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The county crop yield estimates released by USDA’s National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) Feb. 20 offer one last telling glimpse of the extreme challenges and a few pleasant surprises that defined the 2019 season.

The first six months of the year were the wettest on record in the state and planting delays reached epic proportions, which subsequently led to record prevented plantings and reduced yields.

Crop plantings in Illinois last season totaled just 10.5 million acres of corn, down 5% from 2018, and 9.95 million acres of soybeans, down 8%.

State yields averaged 181 bushels per acre for corn, down 29 bushels from the 2018 record, and 54 bushels for beans, 9.5 bushels off the previous mark.

Meanwhile, prevented plant area totaled more than 1.5 million acres in the state and a record 19.4 million acres nationwide, including 11.4 million acres of corn.

“Planting and harvest conditions were extremely difficult, in some areas much more than others,” said Mark Schleusener, Illinois state statistician with NASS. “June-planted corn was very common last year, much more so than normal.”

In fact, corn planting progress didn’t reach 50% in the state until June 4, the latest date to reach the midpoint in the last 60 years.

Counties with the most prevented plant acres in Illinois last year included Bureau, DeKalb, Henry, Kankakee, LaSalle, Lee, Livingston, Whiteside and Will. Overall, more than 200 counties recorded more than 25,000 acres apiece of prevented plantings nationwide.

Yields, while down considerably from recent years, were a “pleasant surprise” given the circumstances, Schleusener noted.

Illinois led the nation in total soybean production (532 million bushels) as 14 counties averaged more than 60 bushels per acre. The top five were Sangamon (65.5 bushels per acre), Carroll (64.7), Morgan (64.1) and Macon and Tazewell with 63.8.

However, five counties averaged less than 40 bushels per acre of soybeans last season, with a low of 34 bushels per acre in Union County.

McLean (18.1 million bushels) and Livingston (16.1 million bushels) were the two highest soybean producing counties in the nation last year.

Corn yields ranged from 200-plus bushels per acre in seven counties to lows of 129.2 bushels in Jefferson and 129 bushels in Lake counties.

The top five corn yielding counties last year were Sangamon (206.3 bushels per acre), Carroll (206.1), Morgan (205.8), Cass (205.6) and Tazewell (205.6).

McLean County nudged Kossuth County, Iowa, for the largest county corn crop last year of 61.7 million bushels. The other top corn producing counties in Illinois last year were Champaign (48.9 million, which ranked fourth nationwide), Livingston (46.9 million), Iroquois (45.7 million) and LaSalle (42.7 million).

A lack of information prevented yield estimates in the state for 27 counties for soybeans and 24 counties for corn.

NASS requires at least 30 reports per county, or a sum of acres representing at least 25% for the county, to generate yield estimates, Schleusener added. END