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Large Variation in Minnesota's 2016 Corn-Yield Estimates

Most crop experts are now agreeing that Minnesota's 2016 crop yields are likely to be highly variable across the state, especially for corn.

In the last USDA Crop Report on August 12, the 2016 Minnesota corn yield was projected at 184 bushels per acre, which would be the second highest in history, trailing only last year's record yield of 188 bushels per acre. Other recent statewide average corn yields include: 158 bushels per acre in 2014, 160 bushels per acre in 2013, 165 bushels per acre in 2012, and 156 bushels per acre in 2011.

Interestingly enough, there has been quite a range in the estimated 2016 Minnesota corn yields by private analysts--ranging from about 172 to near 180 bushels per acre. However, all of the estimates are below the August USDA estimate, but are still well above final statewide averages from 2011-2014. Historically, Minnesota's final average corn yield tends to decline a bit as harvest goes on, due to average corn yields in the central and northern portions of the state being lower than anticipated.

This year may be different than other years, as portions of southwest and south-central Minnesota experienced a variety of weather challenges during the growing season, and are likely to have lower-than-expected yields.

The USDA Crop Report on August 12 projects Iowa to achieve a record average corn yield of 197 bushels per acre in 2016, which would surpass the 2015 state record yield of 192 bushels per acre. Most private analysts agree that Iowa's 2016 corn crop should surpass (or be close to) the 2015 record yield. However, some late-season dry weather concerns in portions of the state, along with higher-than-normal disease occurrences, raised concern regarding Iowa's high corn-yield projections.

Statewide corn yields in states such as Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio have been "up and down" in recent years. After achieving record or near-record yields in 2014, corn yields dropped off considerably last year. For 2016, Illinois corn yields are projected to approach the 2014 record level. Indiana yields are estimated to be above average

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and Ohio yields are expected to be slightly below average.

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In the August 12 report, the USDA projected a record national average corn yield of 175.1 bushels per acre, which would surpass the previous record U.S. corn yield of 171 bushels per acre in 2014. The USDA is currently estimating total 2016 U.S. corn production at over 15.1 billion bushels, which would be the highest in history and would surpass the previous record of 14.2 billion bushels in 2014.

Many private analysts feel that the USDA estimates for both the national average corn yield and total 2016 U.S. corn production are a bit too high, given the poor, early and mid-season growing conditions in the western Corn Belt, along with numerous areas that have faced crop challenges later in the growing season.

One of the biggest challenges with the Minnesota corn crop is usually getting the crop mature before the first killing frost. Average first frost dates range from around September 20 in the northern areas of the state to around October 15 in southeast Minnesota. The good news is that crop development in many areas of the state is much more advanced this year, compared to a normal year. As of August 31, a total of 2,336 growing degree units (GDUs) had been accumulated since May 1, 2016, at the University of Minnesota's Southern Research and Outreach Center (SROC) in Waseca, MN. That level of GDU accumulation is approximately 10 percent above normal, and usually does not occur until September 13 in an average year.

Corn is considered to have reached physiological maturity once it is in the "black layer" stage. Some of the earlier-planted corn in southern Minnesota is likely to reach this stage by September 10-15, while later-planted corn, and corn in other areas of the state, may be a week or two later. The concern for an early frost does not appear to be as great in 2016, compared to 2014 and 2013, when corn was planted much later and growing conditions were less favorable.

Many portions of Minnesota received record or near-record levels of precipitation during the 2016 growing season. The SROC in Waseca received 11.7 inches of rainfall in August, which was the second wettest August in history, and was just shy of the record monthly rainfall in 1924. The very wet August followed the second-wettest July in history in Waseca, with 8.93 inches of rainfall. This brought the two-month total precipitation for July and August to 20.63 inches in Waseca, which exceeded the previous two-month precipitation record.

One concern for harvest could be extremely wet field conditions that exist in many areas of Minnesota and the surrounding states. If the wetter-than-normal conditions continue through September, the saturated field conditions could lead to some very challenging harvest conditions. These types of soil conditions are also favorable for the development of root rot and stalk-rot diseases in crops, which could result in more crop lodging, as well as increased harvest losses.

The August 12 USDA Crop Report was based on crop conditions as of

August 1, and the next crop report on September 12 will be based on conditions as of September 1. Many crop experts expect slightly lower yield and production estimates in the September 12 report.

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