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Ag Review for 2016

As we reach the end of the year, it's a good time to reflect on what happened agriculturally.

This article is the first of a two-part series, with a review of 2016 crop production and weather conditions this week, and a review of livestock production, input costs, grain prices, and the overall farm economy next week.

The following are some highlights regarding crop production and weather conditions for 2016:

This year will be remembered as one of the best crop production years ever in some areas of the Upper Midwest, as well as the second year in a row of near-record crop yields. Farm operators in many portions of western Minnesota and eastern North Dakota experienced some of their best corn and soybean yields in their farming careers this past growing season. However, in portions of south-central and southwest Minnesota, northwest Iowa, and southeast South Dakota, conditions were much more variable, due to a variety of weather challenges throughout the growing season. The main weather challenge was record or near-record rainfall from May to September, which resulted in flooding and challenging growing conditions.

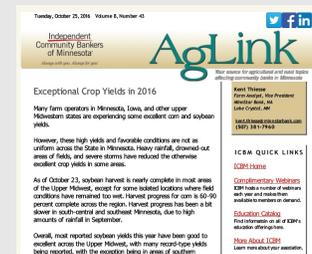
Most of the corn acres in the Upper Midwest were planted on a timely basis in late April or early May and soybean acres were planted in May, except in the previously-mentioned areas that faced weather challenges. Some portions of southwest Minnesota and northwest Iowa did not finish corn planting until late May nor soybean planting until early June. Fortunately, the later planting dates were fairly well offset by the longer-the-normal growing season, which allowed crops to fully mature. A much bigger challenge came from the heavy rainfall in June, which totaled 10-12 inches over the course of just a few days in some portions of south-central Minnesota. Many of these areas stayed very wet throughout the growing season and then received another round of very heavy rainfall in mid-September, which added 7-12 inches of precipitation in some areas.

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Crop conditions in 2016 were quite favorable in the eastern and southern Corn Belt, and in states including Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio, which dealt with very poor growing conditions and reduced yields in 2015. Illinois is projected to have a record 2016 corn yield of 202 bushels per acre, compared to only 175 bushels per acre in 2015, while Indiana corn estimates are at 177 bushels per acre in 2016, compared to 150 bushels in 2015. Similarly, 2016 soybean yields in Illinois are projected at a record level of 62 bushels per acre, which compares to 56 bushels per acre in 2015, and 2016 Indiana soybean yields are estimated at 59 bushels per acre, compared to 50 bushels per acre in 2015.

In most of western Minnesota, portions of southern Minnesota, and much of Iowa, 2016 corn and soybean yields were very good to excellent. Whole-field corn yields generally ranged from 185 to over 200 bushels per acre, while whole-field soybean yields were mostly in a range of approximately 50 to 60 bushels per acre or higher, with some yields approaching 70 bushels per acre. There was considerable yield variation in 2016, due to the occurrence of excessive rainfall, flooded fields, severe storms, and other factors. Some portions of South Dakota also became quite dry late in the growing season. Many whole-farm 2016 corn and soybean yields in western Minnesota and eastern North Dakota, as well as in some locations in southern Minnesota and Iowa, were reported to be among the best ever.

Based on the latest USDA Crop Report, Minnesota is projected to have a record 2016 corn yield of 190 bushels per acre, which would beat the previous record yield of 188 bushels per acre in 2015, and compares to only 156 bushels per acre in 2014 and 160 bushels per acre in 2013. The USDA is also estimating a record 2016 corn yield in Iowa at 199 bushels per acre, which compares to the previous record yield of 192 bushels per acre in 2015.

The USDA is estimating the 2016 Minnesota soybean yield to be at a record level of 52 bushels per acre, exceeding the previous record yield of 50 bushels per acre in 2015, and far exceeding the 2014 yield of 41.5 bushels per acre. The 2016 Iowa soybean yield is also estimated at a record level of 59 bushels per acre, compared to the previous record of 56.5 bushels per acre in 2015. It is very unusual for Minnesota and Iowa to have record yields for both corn and soybeans two years in a row.

By the end of November, the total annual precipitation for 2016 at the University of Minnesota's Southern Research and Outreach Center in Waseca, Minnesota was the greatest official annual precipitation level ever recorded in Minnesota history. The Waseca location had received 54.13 inches of accumulated precipitation in 2016 as of November 30. The 2016 precipitation total in Waseca is about 20 inches above normal.

Some areas of western south-central and southwest Minnesota reported even higher unofficial total rainfall amounts than Waseca during the 2016 growing season, due to above average rainfall

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during the month of June, in addition to more springtime rainfall. The locations that were impacted by delayed planting and drown-out damage in June, reported greater yield reductions than the areas that were impacted by the excess rainfall later in the growing season. The saturated soil conditions this past Fall resulted in some very challenging harvest conditions and made Fall tillage and manure applications quite difficult.

Over 2,900 growing degree units (GDUs) were accumulated in Waseca during the 2016 growing season by the time of the first killing frost on October 8. This is about 18 percent above the normal annual GDU accumulation level, and was the second warmest growing season ever recorded at Waseca--trailing only the drought year of 1988. The higher level of GDUs in 2016 was due to a combination of timely planting in many areas, warmer-than-normal temperatures in the last half of the growing season, as well as a very long growing season, which extended well into October in most areas. A nice stretch of weather in late October and November also helped farm operators complete the 2016 harvest season before the onset of winter conditions, even in some of the areas with saturated soil.

For more information, contact Kent Thiesse, Farm Management Analyst and Vice President, MinnStar Bank, Lake Crystal at: 507-381-7960 or kent.thiesse@minnstarbank.com.

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