

Agriculture News

Ag News: Around the State

by Robert Burns

COLLEGE STATION – Despite the drought, the state's pecan harvest will be exceptionally large this year, a predicted 65 million pounds, according to a Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service expert.

On an average year, the Texas crop is between 50 million and 55 million pounds, according to Dr. Larry Stein, AgriLife Extension horticulture specialist in Uvalde who works mainly with pecans, fruits, grapes and vegetable crops.

"The crop is good, and they seem to be well-filled," he said. "The quality seems pretty good. The nut size may be a little bit small, but that's okay."

The high yields and big crop are both good and bad news for growers, Stein noted.

The good news is this year is a great improvement over the 2011 crop, which, because of the drought, was less than half the average, driving up prices to the consumer, he said. On the negative side, the big crop may drive down wholesale prices for growers, and the large nut set is resulting in a lot of limb breakage throughout the state.

"We're probably seeing more limbs breaking (in orchards) than not," he said. "Most years, you have enough insect pressure that will take some of the nutlets off before they set. In 2012, the crop was large enough, and the insect pressure was so dispersed, that a lot of trees that would not ordinarily set that many pecans, set an overabundance. As the nuts fill, the combined weight of the leaves and nuts is breaking limbs."

Shuck opening, more commonly called "shuck-split," came early in 2012. (Texas A&M AgriLife Communications photo by Robert Burns)

Monte Nesbitt, AgriLife Extension horticulture specialist, College Station, said the excess fruit production was a direct result of the drought continuing into the early growing season.

When stressed, a pecan tree will form more fruit in an attempt to make sure the species is preserved, Nesbitt said. The late-season rains also contributed to the large survival rate of the nutlets and resulting limb breakage.

"Commercially, what we'll do is trunk-shake in mid- to late-July and take some of the nuts off," Stein said. "What a homeowner should have done is to take a stick out there and knock some of the nuts off."

But untrained, non-commercial growers typically think more nuts are better, Stein said, and leave all the nutlets to set to the tree's detriment.

More information on the current Texas drought and wildfire alerts can be found on the AgriLife Extension Agricultural Drought Task Force website at <http://agrilife.tamu.edu/drought/>

AgriLife Extension district reporters compiled the following summaries:

The 12 Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Districts

CENTRAL: Following good rains, small grains were emerging. The pecan harvest began, with varying quality. The cotton harvest was nearly complete, and gins were running at high capacity. Livestock were in good condition.

COASTAL BEND: Fieldwork for the 2013 crop season began where conditions were dry enough. The only cotton left unharvested was in the northern part of the region. Hay was abundant, with many producers looking for different methods to market their excess stocks. Shorter days and cooler nights slowed Bermuda grass growth, but bluestem and other bunch grasses were growing well. Farmers expected to take another hay cutting before the first frost. Where there was not adequate rain, livestock producers continued to provide supplemental feed. Cattle remained in good condition, with herd numbers steady. The pecan harvest was expected to begin in a few weeks, with phenomenal yields anticipated. Many of the early season varieties were nearly ready, while later-season varieties and natives are a month to six weeks away from harvest.

EAST: A cold front was accompanied by slow, soaking rains that raised soil-moisture levels and lowered temperatures. Accumulations ranged from 2 to 10 inches. Though cooler temperatures slowed growth of warm-season grasses, many hay producers expected to get one more cutting. Many have taken four cuttings already this year. Winter-forage planting continued, with some ryegrass already emerged. Livestock were in good shape. Producers continued to cull herds, and wean and sell market-ready calves. Armyworm numbers increased. Pecan scab was reported in some orchards. Some areas reported increased feral hog activity.

Far West: Scattered showers brought at least 0.2 to 0.5 inch of rain to much of the region, with some counties receiving considerably more. Pecos, Ector and Crane counties received from 1 inch to 1.5 inches, while Val Verde County got up to 3 inches, with the town Lola Alta in the southern part of the county getting nearly 5 inches. The rain came hard and fast in

some areas, leading to more runoff than filtration into the soil profile. Ranchers began working cattle. Pregnancy rates on palpated cows were reportedly lower than usual, perhaps due to poor summer grazing conditions. Producers were culling herds, with a few still feeding. Pawnee pecans were being harvested. Western variety pecans began shuck split. High winds blew out lots of nuts and broke small limbs in some orchards. Cotton growers were applying harvest aids and defoliants. Bolls were opening. Alfalfa growers finished the sixth cutting of the season. If days remain warm, a seventh cutting may be possible. Onion planting was finished.

NORTH: Though the district received from 1 inch to 5 inches of rain, soil moisture mostly remained short to adequate. The rains were slow, so there was not much in the way of runoff water to replenish livestock ponds, most of which remained low. There was an early frost in a few counties. Unseasonably cool weather slowed grass growth but brought up early wheat. Hay supplies were good, with some producers still cutting and baling. Livestock were in fair to good condition. Ryegrass planting proceeded at full force at dairies and ranches. The corn harvest was finished, the cotton harvest nearly done, and the soybean harvest more than 75 percent completed. From 15 to 80 percent of oats and 10 to 100 percent of wheat were planted, depending upon the area.

PANHANDLE: Temperatures varied, being average at the beginning of the week, with much cooler weather later. Some areas saw the first freeze. Most areas received some moisture, from a trace to 2 inches. Soil-moisture levels were mostly short. The corn harvest continued, and cotton was mostly in fair condition. Wheat planting continued. Cattle were in fair to good condition.

ROLLING PLAINS: Cooler, wet weather prevailed, which was good news for the winter wheat crop, prompting extensive plantings. Some producers planted wheat for winter grazing. Others planned to bale the crop to replenish hay supplies. Late-planted cotton was in good to excellent condition as the wet weather came just in time. Producers hoped for a late freeze, which will allow cotton to mature. Dryland cotton producers were contacting insurance companies, discussing options for this year's crop. Peanut producers were in the middle of harvest, with average yields reported. Pastures took a turn for the better after the rains, and grasses and wild rye grew about a foot within the last two weeks. Livestock were in good condition. Some pecans neared being harvest-ready. Runoff moisture was still needed for stock tanks.

SOUTH: Northern counties received substantial rains, and soil-moisture levels varied throughout the region. Northern counties reported 50 to 100 percent adequate soil-moisture conditions. Eastern counties had 25 to 100 percent very short soil moisture. Western counties reported 50 to 100 percent short soil-moisture levels, except for Zavala County, where soil-moisture levels were 100 percent adequate. Southern counties had 80 to 100 percent very short soil-moisture conditions, with the exception of the Willacy County where they were 60 percent adequate. Rangeland and pastures were in fair to good condition, especially in parts of the region fortunate enough to get substantial rains in the last few weeks. Livestock producers were still providing supplemental feed, and along with the improved grazing, cattle body-condition scores improved. In Frio County, peanut growers were harvesting early maturing varieties. In Jim Wells County, producers were preparing fields for planting winter forages, but had to wait for seed. In Zavala County, producers were planting dryland wheat and oats to take advantage of the good soil moisture. Also in that area, early planted cabbage progressed well, the cotton gins were running around the clock, and spinach planting began. In Cameron County, farmers were irrigating early planted sugarcane and row crops, and fall tomatoes and onions were progressing. In Starr County, late-summer cantaloupes were being harvested and onion-planting preparations continued.

SOUTH PLAINS: The region remained mostly dry, but with much cooler weather. A few areas received rain as the cold front moved through. Garza County received from 1 inch to 2 inches of rain during a two-day period. The western part of Mitchell County got 12 inches of rain, while the rest of the county received 5-6 inches. Cotton growers were applying harvest aids. The grain sorghum, sunflower and peanut harvests were ongoing. Winter wheat continued to do well. Pastures and rangeland were in poor condition, but have improved somewhat where there was rain in the past couple of weeks. Cattle were mostly in good condition, with limited supplemental feeding needed.

SOUTHEAST: Some counties received rain, raising soil moisture levels, while near-normal temperatures promoted more forage growth in some areas. Cooler temperatures began to slow summer-forage growth in others. Many producers planted winter forages, with a few planting oats and winter wheat but most planting annual ryegrass. A few producers took a final cutting of hay. In Brazoria County, the cotton harvest was complete. Preparation of seedbeds for rice, corn, and grain sorghum continued. Many growers reported good hay supplies. Jefferson County had 4 to 6 inches of rain. Orange County continued to have dry weather, which allowed for hay harvesting.

SOUTHWEST: The region had cooler temperatures early in the week, followed by a warming trend. Recent rains kicked off grass growth and aided wheat and oats. Rain was still needed in some areas. Overall, pastures looked good.

WEST CENTRAL: The region had mild fall weather, with warm days and much cooler nights. Fields were drying out after rains the previous week, allowing wheat and oat planting to proceed. Hay fields improved thanks to earlier rains. Rangeland and pastures were greening up. Runoff from the rains helped replenish stock-water tanks. Livestock remained in good condition, with supplemental feeding continuing. Some pecan growers began harvesting.

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