

Overview of the 2012 wheat season

July, 2012
(updated Oct, 2012)

Production:

Michigan wheat growers planted an estimated 570,000 acres (MI NASS) for 2012. This was 19 percent (130,000 acres) below the level planted the previous year. Harvested acres are estimated to be 540,000 acres to account for wheat planted as a cover crop, and crop loss due to delayed planting and excessive rains in southern tier counties.

As of late Sept, 2012, the Michigan office of NASS has raised its yield estimate to 76 bu/ac, one bushel more than was achieved in 2011. The 2012 season's yield represents the second year in a row that a new record high yield has been set for the state.

Crop development:

Weather dominated the conversation and many of the realities during the 2012 season. March brought the warmest temperatures on record and subsequent months provided the least amount of rain in memory.

Following an exceptionally mild winter, new growth occurred extremely early in response to March's warm temperatures. Predictably, the premature growth faced some seasonably frigid temperatures in subsequent weeks. During March, temperatures dipped to the low teens on the tail of several warm days. This caused isolated losses of plants within some fields across the state. More threatening was a return of cold temperatures during the last couple days of April when temperatures plummeted below 24 degrees. Surprisingly, the crop, then at growth stages 7 and 8, was largely unscathed other than modest tiller loss. Tolerance to this freeze event may have been due to the crop's adaptability following several days of unseasonably cool temperatures.

While the crop was largely able to survive the most notable freeze events, collectively

the repeated bouts of low temperatures in April took a toll on the crop. Wheat exhibited repeated freeze burn, persistent yellowing, and, in some cases, mortality of tillers. In addition, fields tended to be unusually sensitive to applications of liquid nitrogen fertilizer and herbicides.

With the return of more normal temperatures in May, the crop finally regained a healthy color and resumed more normal development. Unfortunately, this also marked the onset of drought stress, and in the final tally, it was the lack of rainfall that proved most limiting to Michigan's wheat yields.

Flowers (anthers) first emerged during the third and fourth week of May. Harvest time was the earliest in recent decades due to the season's early start and the hot, dry conditions at season's end. The July 4 holiday found the southern tier counties' harvest to be nearly completed, the mid-state and Saginaw Valley past the midway mark, and the north-central region and deep Thumb areas poised to aggressively harvest the following day.

Diseases:

Leaf diseases were, for the most part, relatively light. Early on, powdery mildew and Septoria leaf spot were common, but their development was eventually hampered with the on-set of the sunny, warm days of June. Stripe rust was perhaps more prevalent this season than ever before. It could be found on susceptible varieties across the entire state, but may have been most severe in north-central Michigan. As always, leaf rust made a showing, but likely came in too late to significantly affect yields. Stem rust was also found late in the season in a few isolated cases. A yellow-red tint could be seen on flag

leaves in many fields across the state, presumably due to environmental stresses or the Barley yellow dwarf virus. As the national prediction model suggested, pressure from Fusarium head blight (scab) was very low.

Insect monitoring:

Armyworms were the insect of note this season. Their numbers were extremely high in some individual fields, particularly within the more central latitudes of the state. Aphids were more prevalent this season. Although their numbers were insufficient to cause feeding losses, they apparently were successful in transmitting some Barley yellow dwarf virus.

Grain quality

Overall, grain quality was exceptionally good this season. This can be attributed to the predominantly hot and dry conditions that characterized June. Test weights and falling numbers were reported to be good to excellent across the state, and D.O.N. levels were unusually low.

Grain prices

For the 12 months following the 2011 wheat harvest, the average monthly farm price across all wheat classes ranged from \$5.94 to \$6.96 and averaged \$6.50 (MI NASS). Prices received by growers during the next 12 months promises to be significantly higher.

Currently, in response to wide-spread drought, wheat prices have risen by about \$2.50 per bushel since mid-June. At this writing (July 20, 2012), prices on the CBT have reached \$9.43 and, depending on the point of delivery, the basis is mostly 0 to - \$0.30. Bids for the 2013 crop are currently near the \$8.00 mark.

The premium for white wheat over red wheat is mostly below 30 cents. Unlike a year ago, there is little or no carry in the market.

What's next?

With drought plaguing much of the country, including Michigan, the agricultural situation is volatile at the farm, industry and international market levels.

Growers may find the prospects for planting wheat to be encouraging this fall. At this juncture, it appears that pricing prospects place wheat in a strong position to bid for 2013 acreage against competing commodities. In addition, row crops will likely be harvested early enough this fall for growers to comfortably plant all their intended acres. The inclination to grow wheat may also be bolstered by growers' production successes during the past two years.

Pictures:

- *Dead flag leaf is evidence of damaged growing-point (top);*
- *True armyworm (center);*
- *Striped rust (bottom).*



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