

Illinois Wheat Crop: Small But Good

Nat Williams Jul 16, 2020

Early reports following the Illinois wheat harvest hint at a good but smallish crop. With virtually all the wheat out of the ground, many producers reported good yields and few problems with quality. “It’s better than I expected,” said Greg Bigham, who farms near Vergennes in Jackson County. “It was cool and wet in April, so I didn’t have high hopes. But we sprayed it with Quilt and Prosaio fungicides. I’m pleasantly surprised.”

Daniel Schult, an agronomist with Crop IMS, said that while there are variances, the crop looks good overall. “There’s a pretty good range, but there’s some really good wheat this year,” said Schult, whose area covers the high-acreage wheat counties of Perry, Washington, and Clinton, among others. “The medium maturity yielded better than the earlier stuff that I’ve seen,” he said. “As far as ballpark guesses, I would say the end was in the mid-70s, and I had several fields in my territory that averaged at 100 or more. It’s really, really good this year.”

Mike Von Bokel, who farms near Saint Jacob in Madison County, had a late harvest. He didn’t get finished until July 7, but he is pleased with the quality and quantity. “We had excellent yields,” he said. “My best field averaged 98.4 bushels per acre. The worst, where we had some drowned out, was at 64. But that was a small field.”

Farmers in some areas were unable to get any wheat planted last fall because of a wet, cool fall. Joe Leidner, who farms near Mulberry Grove, in Bond County, was one of them. “I had a late harvest. I couldn’t have planted any wheat until Oct. 20,” he said. “I like to see it in by Oct. 15. But if I am going and it’s pretty warm, I plant until the first of November. Last fall was cool. And we had a couple of rain events. “You don’t get much growth on it. Last fall was very cool. It comes up and is kind of pitiful. It does not have much growth on it. This spring was cool, so it never got off to a rip-roaring start.”

Leidner did say that some of his neighbors did very well. “It’s up and down, though,” he said. “One guy reported anywhere from 52 to 90 (bushels per acre). The 52 was planted on the 25th of October. The 90-bushels wheat was planted in September.”

Mark Miller of Mennel Milling in Mount Olive has not heard about yields from his customers. But he is happy with the quality this year. “Overall, quality is really good,” he said. “We’re in the upper 59-pound (pounds per bushel) average. Moisture has been all over the board. The falling numbers held up really well. Vomitoxin has been very good, averaging about 1 part per million. We have seen a few spikes, but nothing to be worried about. “I was a little bit pessimistic about it in early June. But it turned out really good. I applaud the farmers for getting out there and putting fungicide on it. I think it’s going to be a good crop to mill this year.”

Schult pointed out that more and more farmers in recent years have adopted intensive management measures, including fungicide applications. “Most make multiple applications of fungicide, two applications of nitrogen, and Palisade,” he said. “I haven’t

heard of anybody getting docked.” Schult added that one test strip planted by the company showed a 20-bushel-per-acre yield boost with fungicide compared to no fungicide.

While weather conditions prevented some farmers like Leidner from planting wheat last fall, Von Bokel got more planted than ever. “I was in an area where we had a lot of prevent planting,” he said. “I put some of that to wheat.”

Only 570,000 acres of wheat were planted in Illinois last fall, an 80,000-acre drop from the previous year, according to Mark Schleusener of USDA’s National Agricultural Statistics Service. That was an 80,000-acre drop from the 650,000 planted the previous year. Nationally, total wheat acreage hit its lowest level in history, with 44.3 million acres of winter and spring wheat planted in 2019, Schleusener said.