

View from the Cab

Wheat harvest off to good start for Franklin County farmer

By Daniel Grant, FarmWeek Jun 26, 2020

Rain slowed wheat harvest at a number of locations around the state earlier this week following a recent surge of fieldwork activity. But most farmers, including Leon McClerren of Thompsonville, didn't seem to mind. "In southern Illinois, it's always a good thing to get rain in June, so it was really welcome," McClerren said after his farm received about an inch of precipitation June 22-23. "I don't think it was enough to hurt the test weight on wheat."



Leon McClerren, Franklin County Farm Bureau president, pauses while servicing his combine in one of his wheat fields near Thompsonville. He cut about one-third of his 1,500 acres of wheat prior to a rain delay June 22-23. (Photo by Daniel Grant)

In fact, McClerren's crop previously dried down enough that he switched from drying wheat to taking it directly to the elevator out of field. He was about one-third done cutting about 1,500 acres of wheat as of June 23. "When we started (harvest), we were drying wheat because we were anxious to get started," he said. "The last day we ran (before this week's rain delay), we were taking in 63.7 test weight wheat right out of the field and it was dry, so we were very satisfied."

Overall, Illinois farmers harvested 23% of the wheat crop the third week of June, pushing harvest to 26% complete, although still behind the average pace of 37% as of June 22.

The National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) Illinois field office estimates the state wheat yield could average 73 bushels per acre this season, up 6 bushels from last year, with total production in Illinois of 38.7 million bushels, up 5% from 2019. NASS rated 65% of the wheat crop in good to excellent condition as of Monday, up considerably from just 27% at the same time last year.

"The yields have been really good and the test weights have been good, so far," McClerren said. "We'd like to think we'll be done by the end of the month, if the weather gives us the chance."

Timely wheat harvest is important for McClerren and many other growers in southern Illinois to get double crop soybeans off to a good start. "Everything gets doubled

cropped. That is part of our rotation,” McClerren said. “The planter is right behind the combine.”

McClerrren has grown wheat, soybeans and corn for more than four decades. “I’ve been farming since I was big enough to walk, with my father, and have been farming on my own a little over 40 years,” he said while servicing his combine. “We’re in place where I’m beginning to transition. I’ve got a younger person working with me to hopefully take over the farm.”

McClerrren also continues to serve as president of the Franklin County Farm Bureau. “I believe Farm Bureau is important to every farmer and it’s important we give something and help out,” he added.