

California Wheat

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CWC Wheat Bulletin

January 16, 2012

Winter Wheat Seeding Report Released

The National Agricultural Statistics Service released its first estimate of planted acreage for this year's wheat crop on January 12th. Winter wheat is estimated at 41.9 million acres, up three percent, for the United States as a whole. California acreage is estimated at 660,000 acres, down slightly from 2011. Among major winter wheat states, Kansas, Oklahoma, Colorado, and Texas show increased acreage while Nebraska, Montana and Washington are down.

Durum wheat planting in California and Arizona is estimated to increase by 15 percent over 2011 and 24 percent over 2010, although planting is ongoing in both the Imperial and San Joaquin Valleys. Since durum is grown under irrigation in both states, the recent lack of rain is not expected to have much impact on the durum crop. For more information the impact on the common wheat crop, see below.

Lack of Rain in California Affecting Crops

An obvious statement, but the very dry start to this growing season is affecting many crops in California, including wheat. Although approximately 80 percent of our wheat is irrigated, it is very unusual for irrigation to be needed this early in the season. We asked UC Cooperative Extension farm advisors to report what they are seeing in their areas.

- **Kent Brittan**, who covers Yolo, Solano and Sacramento Counties, conducts variety trials in four locations in the region. At this point, Delta wheat looks to be most affected by lack

of rain, but all the fields are suffering. He has seen stands that have not emerged at all and fields where the wheat is in arrested development. Where wheat has emerged, the stands are often uneven due to the difference in available moisture. Some irrigation has started in recent weeks, but the water supply varies depending on the ability of local water agencies to fill the ditches this early.

Several growers have or are considering reseeding their fields, but continued lack of rain makes this a difficult decision. Kent noted that the dry conditions are affecting potential wheat yield. "The next ten days are critical," he said. Everyone is hoping that the rain predicted to arrive later this week will materialize.

- **Steve Wright**, farm advisor in Kings and Tulare Counties, reported on January 11th: "We have not received hardly any effective rainfall. Our dryland wheat region has not emerged and hopefully we get some rain out of a system supposed to hit in about 10 days. Most of the irrigated areas are being irrigated up this week. Many fields already started the end of November through mid December. Those early irrigated fields look good. Some fields were pre-irrigated following corn and are now receiving their first in crop irrigation. Wheat growth is slow so far. Our UC studies have shown that with wheat for grain there has not been a yield loss when comparing wheat planted the middle of November, December, and all the way up to

January 20th. I would expect a 2-4 ton/acre yield loss for silage just because of the shorter wheat height that we have observed in these studies with a later emergence. Growers planting or replanting in January should increase their seed rates due to lack of tillering expected with the late plantings. In some cases growers should consider over-seeding where there are uneven stands. Weeds are coming on where fields have been irrigated up and herbicide treatments are being applied."

- **Steve Orloff**, farm advisor in Siskiyou County, also sent comments on January 11th: "We too have had severe drought conditions. Most of our grain, especially cereals grown for grain rather than hay, are spring planted. So there are not too many acres affected so far. What grain has been planted is struggling along. Irrigation at this time of year is not really an option because the irrigation districts are not operating for canal water. And, no one pumps this time of year because of the freezes each night and the standby charges for pumping. It better rain soon and a lot or it is going to be a very tough year. We have gotten a reprieve from some of the conflicts over water with the wet year last year but this year looks scary."

Commission Updates:

- At its December meeting, Commissioners voted to accept the petition from **Scott Schmidt** to represent District 7 (Fresno County.) Thanks and welcome to Scott.
- **Attention Growers:** The 2012 Variety Survey will be sent out in early February. Please fill it out and return it promptly - your responses enable us to make our first estimate on how much wheat is planted where. This information helps in our wheat marketing efforts, informs our budget process and identifies varieties for crop quality testing. As always we will be asking

about varieties planted and potential impact of weather on production. We appreciate your participation!

- Commission Chair Larry Hunn, Vice Chair Roy Motter, and Executive Director Janice Cooper will travel to **Washington, DC** later this month for national wheat meetings. They will join leaders from the California Association of Wheat Growers on visits to key members of the California Congressional Delegation to discuss issues of interest to California growers including the pending Farm Bill and adequate funding for ag research and marketing programs.
- **Upcoming Commission Meetings:** The Commission's Research Committee will meet by conference call on January 24 at 3pm. The next full Commission meeting is scheduled for April 11 at 10am in Sacramento. As always, agendas are posted on our website at least 10 days in advance of the meetings.
- Summary results from the Collaborator variety trials plus current agronomic data from the statewide field trials can be found on the UC Davis website: <http://smallgrains.ucdavis.edu>