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IOWA FARM BUREAU, FARMERS FIND TUMULTUOUS YIELDS IN 2012 HARVEST

2012 Drought Brings Yield Extremes, Continues to Stress Iowa Livestock Farmers

WEST DES MOINES, IOWA – Sept. 20, 2012 – Iowa farmers, who are in the fields early this year because of an oppressive drought, are seeing yields ‘all over the board’ as they bring in the 2012 crop, say Iowa Farm Bureau Federation (IFBF) information aggregators, agronomists and research experts.

“Every year, we work with Iowa farmers in every corner of the state who volunteer to give us crop updates. It’s been tough this year. We hear about their concerns about crops suffering, the wild range of yields they’re getting now at harvest and their worries about finding feed for cattle on dry pastures this winter. The bottom line is they’re seeing extremes even in a single field. Farmers say yields range from zero to 170 bushels per acre, often in the same field,” says IFBF Spokesman Editor Dirck Steimel.

“In the past four years, we’ve seen every extreme that my grandpa saw in 60 years of farming.

We don’t know what normal is anymore,” says Sioux County crop and livestock farmer Matt Schuiteman. “I looked at information for our farm from 1988, during our last drought. A field closest to our home farm got 63 bushels an acre. This year, it’s 175 bushels an acre. Even with improved conservation and technology, our soil is so variable that our yields range from zero to 270 bushels an acre; where in years past, it would range between 170 to 210 bushels an acre.”

Dave Miller, IFBF director of research and commodity services agrees. “The dominant word on yield this year is variability. We see incredible ranges of yields within a field, from row to row, from farm to farm and, sometimes, just from one side of the fence to the other,” says Miller, who has also farmed for 40 years. He says while there may be unseen things impacting yields, the use of more sophisticated yield monitoring equipment in today’s combines allows farmers to identify such variables faster.

“Could it be soil compaction in one spot with 170 yields suddenly dropping to zero in one side of the field? Or could two days planting difference have made the difference? The question is what you do with that information?” questions Miller.

Miller says risk management and careful planting strategies are vital for farmers.

“Agronomic sleuthing must go on to help each farmer make plans for next year. We’re learning that, while this drought is bad from historical reference, it has been worse and it could be again. Those who’ve been farming long enough can appreciate the great strides technology has brought because new seed genetics that make the crop hardier for drought, new conservation measures, planting strategies and fertilizer monitoring means at least we’ve got a crop this year,” says Miller. “The 1934 drought still stands as the worst drought of the last century; but, because of technology, many farmers are seeing some fields with yields this year that are much better than they would have expected under severe drought conditions.”

Steimel adds that livestock farmers are also feeling the stress from drought.

“It’s not just crop farmers who are on edge as the harvest comes in. Iowa livestock farmers are coming to grips with what the hot, dry summer will mean for their animals as the long winter approaches,” says Steimel. “Their pastures and ponds have dried up and feed supplies are

tight. Many farmers are hauling water to livestock and that’s not a cost-effective option when margins are so thin.”

What’s more, Miller says the harvest yields and livestock numbers will directly impact consumers at the grocery store. “Food price adjustment will be gradual, but we’ll feel impacts of this drought for the next few years on most pork, beef and poultry products.”

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About Iowa Farm Bureau

The Iowa Farm Bureau Federation is a grassroots, statewide organization dedicated to enhancing the People, Progress and Pride of Iowa. More than 153,000 families in Iowa are Farm Bureau members, working together to achieve farm and rural prosperity. For more information about Farm Bureau and agriculture, visit the online Newsroom page at www.iowafarmbureau.com
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