

Sorghum harvest drawing to a close

Posted: Thursday, December 2, 2010 6:00 pm

By RICHARD PORTER Herald Staff Writer

Thanks to an open fall, the sorghum harvest on the High Plains is almost complete. And, according to area experts, that same good fall weather, along with timely rains, is resulting in above-average yields and good quality.

Chris Cogburn, strategic business director for the National Sorghum Producers in Lubbock, said that with the exception of a few fields between Plainview and Amarillo, the region's harvest is about complete.

Cogburn said yields across the country have been above average, and that certainly has been the case on the High Plains.

Regional yields have ranged from 3,500 pounds per acre (approximately 60 bushels per acre) to twice that at 120 bushels.

"We've had just tremendous dryland yields," Cogburn said.

On the state level, he said Hurricane Alex caused some problems in some areas of the state, but that damage was to the quality of grain, not the quantity.

The average yield for Texas is just less than 60 bushels per acre, and Cogburn said the state will exceed that this year. In fact, he continued, the national yield record of 74.1 bushels per acre could be in jeopardy.

The director explained that much of the success of this year's crop is due to timely rains, especially in July. He said the few fields that are not seeing good production were planted late, after those rains came.

Along with the production across the region, Cogburn said another bright spot for the industry this year has been quality.

The average test weight for sorghum on the High Plains is 56 pounds, and this year's crop is pushing 60-61 pounds.

Primarily, that is due to favorable fall weather that allowed the crop to mature.

"When you get test weights like that it means you had good grain fill," Cogburn said. "We had a good fall to finish (the crop) out."

Once the crop is out of the field, a variety of markets are available to area producers.

Florentino Lopez, marketing director for the United Sorghum Checkoff Program, said much of the sorghum in this area goes into ethanol production. What doesn't is exported.

Lopez said there are a number of countries developing into potential markets, including Spain, Egypt, Israel, Japan and Southeast Asia.

Part of that is due to the fact that sorghum still is a non-genetically-modified crop, so it fits those concerns.

At the same time, he continued, the grain seems to fit well into the nutritional requirements for feeding livestock in those countries.

Finally, he said, sorghum is continuing to benefit from the fact that it is a gluten-free alternative to traditional grain flours.

As far as the harvest goes, Cogburn said with the favorable weather the region is seeing, producers should be able to finish by week's end.

"It's pretty well wrapped up," he said.

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