County's annual crop yield averages show state of farming

By EDWIN LEVY

During the harvest season, the rural coffee shop talk will be about corn and soybean yields and the upcoming year. Farmers with the best yields will gladly share their results. However, those with lower yields may not to discuss, making it difficult to get the actual yield averages for the county.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) is responsible for estimating the yield averages for the country, the state, and the county. The estimate is determined by telephone surveys to producers and actual field measurements.

NASS does not release county yield estimates until the legislature so that no one will be aware of the average yield. Adequate time has been allowed to analyze the data. Even though these are estimated numbers, the government and industry will use these values as the established county yield average.

In addition to the county yield averages, NASS also provides the estimated planted and harvested acres in the report. The harvested acre figure is used to estimate production. A production value is calculated by multiplying harvested acres by yield. NASS provides the county statistics for corn, soybeans, and wheat.

Much of the corn did not get planted in Hancock County. However, most producers believe that yields were better than expected from a late planting date. Unfortunately, NASS did not have enough data for the county for a complete report.

For Allen, Hancock, Henry, and some counties across the state, NASS does not report a number unless they have at least 30 producers respond to the survey. If they receive less than 30 responses, the responses need to represent more than 50% of the harvested acres. Hancock County corn information did not meet either of the requirements.

Farm programs will not be affected by the lack of a NASS county yield average. The USDA Farm Service Agency, which manages government farm programs, will continue to use the state average of the estimated planted acres by county to calculate subsidies for farmers.

Without the NASS data for Hancock County, a story can be told about last year's corn crop. NASS has the average corn yield for Northeast Ohio as 175 bushels per acre. Hancock County's corn yield average is probably near this value.

The Farm Service Agency in Hancock County has the certified acres of corn that was planted for 2019. They show about 70,400 acres of corn were planted in Hancock County in 2019. About 64,300 acres were certified as prevented planting. This would be the lowest number of planted acres for this century and, most likely, the lowest production number too.

NASS did provide a county average for soybeans. However, the data is not reliable. Producers would like to see the average price of beans, but considering the late planting date, the $411/bushel is above what most producers expected for the growing season. However, it was lower than the state average of $41. Farmers were only able to plant 114,300 acres of soybeans, the lowest number of planted acres seen this century. This is in contrast to the record number of 144,000 acres planted in 2018.

Total production (494,940,282 bushels) was the highest soybean production for the county since the drought year of 2006, which had a production of 516,000 bushels.

With the fewer acres, Hancock County dropped from the fourth largest soybean-producing county in the state to eighth place. Hancock County has been in the top 20 producing counties of about 245,000 acres in Hancock County were available for planting grain corn in 2019. Using this number, 4% of the acres were planted to soybeans. The remainder were planted to corn and 64% were planted to corn. However, approximately 74% were planted to soybeans.

Farmers are hoping for a better growing season in 2020. We do not need another wet spring and delayed planting. In addition to a good crop, farmers need better grain prices for a full economic recovery.