



USDA'S PROSPECTIVE PLANTINGS report released estimates that corn acres this spring could total 91.99 million acres, up 3.42 million acres or 4% from last year, and soybean acres could total 87.51 million acres, a slight increase from 87.5 million acres in 2022. Photo by Illinois Farm Bureau photographer Catrina Rawson.

USDA projects big bump for corn plantings

By TIMOTHY EGGERT
FarmWeek

Look out, corn acres are on a comeback.

USDA's prospective plantings report released Friday estimates corn acres this spring could total 91.99 million acres, up 3.42 million acres or 4% from last year. Soybean acres could total 87.51 million acres, a slight increase from 87.5 million acres in 2022.

Estimated wheat plantings soared 9% to 49.85 million acres, the largest potential acreage since 2015.

The total 318.1 million acres of principal crops expected to be planted nationwide this season represents a 1.9%, or 5.9 million-acre increase from 2022 and the largest total since 2018.

While the corn bump forecast by USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) wasn't necessarily a surprise, it did go slightly beyond previous trade estimates, said Joe Camp of CommStock Investments.

"Everybody coming into the report seemed bearish about expecting extra corn acres," Camp told the RFD Radio Network. "Well, they got even more than that."

Friday's estimates were a bit more optimistic than levels USDA projected in February at its 99th Annual Ag Outlook Forum, when U.S. corn plantings were estimated at 91 million acres, beans at 87.5 million acres and wheat at 49.5 million acres.

NASS calculated its first planting report of 2023 acreage estimates based on surveys of 72,885 farmers, including 2,594 surveys distributed to farmers in Illinois, during the first two weeks of March.

Corn acreage estimates increased or were unchanged in 40 of the 48 reporting states. In Illinois, corn plantings were

pegged at 11 million acres, up 1.9%, from last year and in-line with a trend in other Corn Belt states.

Corn plantings in Indiana are estimated at 5.5 million acres (up 4.8%), in Iowa at 13.1 million acres (up 1.6%) and Minnesota at 8.4 million acres (up 4.4%). North Dakota's corn plantings are expected to rebound 27.1% to 3.8 million acres.

Soybean acreage estimates, however, increased or were unchanged in 15 of the 29 reporting states.

And while Illinois' projected bean plantings were unchanged from the 10.8 million acres planted in 2022, the 2023 levels, if realized, would represent a second record year for the state.

Soybean plantings are also expected to climb 6.5% to a record 2.3 million acres in Wisconsin and 1.3% to 7.6 million acres in Minnesota, while Indiana's bean plantings are estimated to fall 4.3% to 5.6 million acres.

Largely underpinning the corn acreage shift for 2023, Camp said, is an assumption that "we'll have prevented plant acres come back this year," compared to 2022, when about 6.4 million acres were affected due to spring weather challenges.

"That's already put to the test," Camp said, noting that after farmers were surveyed for the report there were early delays for the southern U.S. crop with wet, soggy conditions and heavy storms rolling through the region.

"We know going forward we're going to be extra sensitive to potentially drawn-out winter in the Northern Plains and the Upper Midwest," Camp said. "We've got to account for that for now but know that it also can change drastically from here."

The outlook for extended winter conditions could already be having an impact on spring wheat plantings, which are mostly concentrated in the Northern Plains, and that the report estimated to dip 2.4% to 10.57 million acres.

"It's kind of an interesting story because if these (spring wheat) planting intentions are realized, then we're looking at the lowest planted acreage of that crop since 1972," NASS Crops Branch Chief Lance Honig said during a webinar on Twitter, noting estimates for that crop have dropped the past five seasons.

Estimates for total winter wheat acres, however, rose to 37.5 million acres, up 12.7% from 2022, and durum increased 9.1% to 1.78 million acres.

Wheat plantings in Illinois were projected at 880,000 acres, a 35.4% increase from 2022 and the most since farmers here planted 1.2 million acres in 2008.

Total cotton plantings, meanwhile, are estimated to fall a staggering 18.2% this season to 11.3 million acres. On sorghum, the report projected farmers intend to plant 5.98 million acres, a 6% drop from 2022.

USDA also released its March 1 quarterly grain stocks report, with corn stocks counted in all positions at 7.4 billion bushels; soybeans at 1.69 billion bushels and wheat at 946 million bushels.

In Illinois, total stored corn was at 1.34 billion bushels (up 6% from last year); soybeans at 270 million bushels (down 20%) and wheat at 19.4 million bushels (down 15%).

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