

Yields

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semis and 1,400-bushel grain cart can't keep up with the loads coming in from Ehmke's fields.

He watched in amazement on Tuesday as he cut a field of hard red winter wheat. The yield monitor kept climbing, soaring above 100 bushels an acre, then 120 before hitting a high of 145.

In the end, this dryland parcel averaged 82 bushels an acre.

"I've cut a lot of irrigated wheat in Nebraska where we are from," said Shaw. "And I've seen irrigated wheat that is not doing this well."

Stars align

The elements were perfect to produce a crop of almost monstrous size.

As Ehmke puts it, it is a once-in-a-lifetime union of plentiful rain at the right time, cool temperatures during filling, along with good management and top genetic varieties.

But even the not-so-good varieties are yielding excellently, said Shaw, adding test weights are averaging between 63 to 65 pounds a bushel – well above the 60-pound benchmark for No. 1-grade wheat. He predicted the excellent harvest stretching from southwest Kansas to Imperial, Nebraska.

His best field during his stop in Oklahoma was 62 bushels an acre.

"A year like this will make any farmer look good," he said. "You can't screw up – 98 percent of it is luck."

Jerald Kemmerer, general manager of Dodge City-based Pride Ag Resources, said farmers are reporting that on their summer fallow ground, wheat yields are reaching 100 bushels an acre.

"All the berries filled," he said.

"I haven't ever heard of it happening – not around here," he added. "You might see some of that on the irrigation, but this year, some of the dryland will do just as well."

The crop, it appears, is so bountiful that some farmers are superstitious – not wanting to talk of big yields and huge supplies because it might slip grain prices even lower than they have already sunk. Landlords also might want more rent, too.

"Farmers buy the technology that provides the information that leads to his economic demise," said Larned-area farmer Tom Giessel. "It just helps the traders."

He admits in his own fields there "is a lot of good wheat." But added not all farmers are seeing high bushels. It depends on the soil, what fields got timely rain and if there was hail.

Moreover, while this is harvest is unprecedented, "I'm not done. If I get a storm, I might harvest less than I did last year."

Ehmke looks at it differently.

"We can't only talk about things that make the market go up," he said. "It's an open marketplace, and the good news and the bad news all need to be in there. If we only talk about the bad news we'd destroy our credibility, we need to be honest and candid about it."

Ron Suppes, who farms in Scott and Lane counties, said the line of semis at the elevators are starting to increase and the wait is getting longer.

Good yields have helped offset the log jams. Suppes Farms is having an outstanding wheat crop. But he hasn't

seen yields nearing 90 – at least not yet.

"We're doing better than average – 60 to 75 bushels an acre," he said, adding, "We've heard some of those yields, we just haven't seen them."

One-stop symphony
Near the Rice County town of Frederick, cutter Bruce Pearson maneuvered a combine through a thick stand of wheat – a yield that he said was way better than his crop of 45 bushels an acre where he farms in Lyon County.

"It's really, really, really good," he said with a chuckle – not wanting to divulge his customer's yields.

"And with these prices, it needs to be really, really good."

He used to make the trip north from Texas, but these days, the fields of Richard Wires is his only stop. He can't seem to shake farming – or harvest, he said.

Pearson said he was among the thousands of farmers who went bankrupt in the 1980s. He worked at Wolf Creek in Coffey County for a number of years, then answered the wheat call

– venturing into the custom cutting business while farming.

"It's a disease," he said of loving his profession. "But I like it."

These days, he just makes the one stop in Rice County. Custom harvest laws, along with having a hard time getting workers, made him decide to stop.

For this stop, he musters up plenty of help. Pearson will spend the week or so with his wife, Cathy, who

runs errands and brings meals to the field. Among the other crew members are granddaughters Whitney, 15, and Riley, 12; his daughter, Heather; son-in-law Brandon Rawlings, a few other relatives, along with two teenagers and a retired truck driver.

His cousin, 15-year-old Ty Swisher, was driving a combine on this day – a job he's done since the age of 12. His family farms near Lebo.

His crew returns every

year because they love the harvest. For Pearson, it is a joy to cut good wheat. At night, he loves watching the combine lights spread across the field, the moon rising.

"When everything is running good – it is kind of like a symphony," he said.

Harvest halt

Rain has hit the harvest, which isn't good, said Craig Bennett, general manager

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"I've cut a lot of irrigated wheat in Nebraska where we are from. And I've seen irrigated wheat that is not doing this well."

Zach Shaw, custom cutter



Jesse Brothers/The Hutchinson News

Ty Swisher, 15, learned to drive a combine at age 12 to help with the annual harvest. He helped his cousin, custom harvester Bruce Pearson, from Emporia, on Wednesday.

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