

Yields

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of Abbyville's Farmers Cooperative. Showers a week ago dropped test weights below 60 pounds – the benchmark for No. 1-grade quality wheat. The downpour Thursday in central Kansas would most likely bring test weights lower. Moreover, more is in the forecast for the upcoming week.

It's becoming a long, drawn-out harvest, he said.

On Wednesday evening, it wasn't rain that stopped the Seltman family as they cut wheat near the eastern Ness County border. With this patch hit hard by disease and hail, they were making adjustments to the combine header because they were getting too much foreign material into the bin.

By then, it was nearing 7 p.m. Pam Seltman pulled the tailgate down on the pickup to create a buffet featuring sauerkraut and brats for the crew, which included her husband, Jeff, her children and brother-in-law, Brian.

Thankfully, Jeff Seltman said as he stood around with his family eating dinner, not all their fields are like this. "Some of it has been real good," he said, adding they have had some fields average in the mid-70s.

They heard a neighbor made 90 bushels an acre, he said, but they haven't hit anything that high, yet.

"We can raise pretty good wheat when it rains," he said.

During one week or two period this spring, the farm recorded 8 inches of rain.

But now, he said, farmers just need a better price at the cooperative.

Prices poor

Today's prices aren't much different than they were when Vance and Louise Ehmke returned to Lane County to farm 40 years ago.

The price of wheat in Dighton on July 1, 1976, was \$3.50 a bushel. By February the next year, wheat had fallen to \$2.17 a bushel.

On Wednesday, Ehmke said the price at the local cooperative was \$3.45. By Friday, it had fallen 20 cents.

The 2016 wheat crop is just that big.

Bins are bursting with wheat – not just domestically – but globally as the U.S. dollar continues to be strong, said custom cutter Shaw. Farmers needed the yields, but it won't mean they will be buying a new pickup.

"No one is going to get rich on the deal – it isn't going to heal anyone up," Shaw said. "It is a salvation you have these high yields to offset the low prices."

Farmers are expected to harvest more than 394 million bushels of wheat this year – 22 percent more than last year, accord to the Kansas Agricultural Statistics Service.

There is talk that a local hog producer will buy wheat for feed, said Ehmke. It's also being considered by cattle feedlots – both of which would open up a different market.

"I hope to hell this wheat market holds where it is at



Custom cutter Bruce Pearson uses three combines to harvest the wheat on the Richard Wires Farm near Frederick in Rice County on Wednesday.

Photos by Jesse Brothers/The Hutchinson News



Amy Bickel/The Hutchinson News

Vance Ehmke talks about the crop of a lifetime from the scale house on his farm near Dighton. The farm is seeing high test weights well above the 60 benchmark for No. 1-grade wheat.

ONLINE

Watch video of Vance Ehmke talking about his "once-in-a-lifetime" Lane County wheat yield at hutchnews.com.



Pam Seltman brings dinner for her husband and family in the field every evening during harvest.



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and it doesn't go any further down," he said.

Ehmke added farmers have weathered a string of drought years, making such a bountiful harvest a blessing.

"If you turn back the clock two or three years – with these same varieties you were sweating blood hoping they would make 30," Ehmke said.

On this 100-percent blue-sky day, Ehmke is giddy about the yields. He watched his other harvesting crew, led by Chad Brink of Minnesota, cut a large patch near his farmstead.

Brink said he has never cut anything like this – not in Kansas.

"It just pours into the tank," he said, adding the combines are slowly rolling through the grain because it is so thick. "It's just phenomenal."

Ehmke said the yields could have been even better if rain would have fallen in May and early June.

"How can you screw with near perfection?" he said with a smile. "A little bit more rain and my god, who knows what we could have done."

"Occasionally, over a 40-year period, you'll have a field that does real well, 80 to 85 bushels an acre," Ehmke said. "But as far as a county-wide yield experience – this is a once-in-a-lifetime experience for us."

For now, he and Louise are just relishing in a harvest.

"The greatest moments of your life are like all the rest in that they come, they happen and they go," Ehmke said. "You can't stop them. But you can sure enjoy them. You just got to be aware that they're happening when they're there. So we are trying to enjoy this regardless of the huge workload that comes with the best wheat crop of our careers."

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