

[print](#) | [close](#)

Bryan Hagler forced to farm around record rainfall in 2013

[Roy Roberson](#)

Wed, 2013-10-23 07:05

Rain, rain and more rain for North Carolina farmer Bryan Hagler made 2013 a year of many 'firsts', most of which he would like to forget.

Hagler who farms cotton first and then wheat, soybeans and corn in Scotland, Robeson, and Hoke counties in southeast North Carolina, says the rainfall that many are calling a 100-year phenomena, forced him to do things he never thought he would do in his farming career.

He grew up on a family farm and after returning from North Carolina State University, where he earned a degree in agriculture in 1980, he began farming on his own.

"I started with a John Deere 4240 tractor, a four-row planter and a disk. I had to pull the disk to the field with the planter, and we would disk a while, then plant a while. If somebody told me I'd have to do that today, I'd just have to find something else to do," he says.

Over the years Hagler has built up his farming acres and has added things like a grain handling system for his storage bins, slowly building his equipment as he built his farm acreage.

Over the years, he says he has seen his fair share of weather related farming problems, but nothing like this year.

Coming off last year, which had almost ideal growing conditions and producing good crops, he was more excited than ever about planting this year's crop.

By April the wheat crop he planted the previous fall looked great and with adequate moisture, he got his corn and cotton planted and all looked right in his world.

"We had some fields that were a little too wet, but nothing out of the ordinary," he says. Then the rains started. From May until August, in Scotland County N.C., as in many areas of the Southeast, the rain just didn't stop.

Working crop in standing water

"I never thought I'd be trying to work a crop in standing water, but we tried it," he says. I knew it wouldn't work, but just sitting there, knowing it was time to get things done and waiting was just so frustrating.

“For several weeks we only harvested one day a week. At the end of the day about all we did was leave ruts and holes in those fields that we tried to work, and that it will take a long time to fix,” he adds.

Hagler sat and watched wheat that could have been cut in June, sit in the soggy fields through July, and then finally dried out enough to harvest in early August. “A friend of mine asked me how that wheat was going to combine in August. My answer was like a lot of questions this year, I don’t know—never done it before,” he says.

Despite sitting in the field more than a month longer than planned, Hagler says his wheat yields and test weight turned out much better than he expected.

“We had good yields on most of our wheat — above the state average”, he adds.

Like most wheat growers in the Southeast this year, he did have some of his wheat sprouting in the head. However, when he sold it, there was no dockage on the price.

The obvious question is why? The only thing he did different this year, he says, he used Quick-Sol, a soil amendment product on all his wheat acres and most of the crops he grows.

“I used a small amount three years ago on a 100-foot wide strip, applied diagonally across a long field, and there was a visible difference in the field. When I ran the yield monitor on it when I picked the crop, there was a yield difference that first year.

“I used Quick-Sol on all our wheat and some of our corn last year and saw some yield advantage, particularly on soybeans.

“This year I put it on most of my land, and it may have helped with the wheat yield and quality — this kind of rain is a first in my lifetime, so it’s hard to say one thing made a difference, but using Quick-Sol is the only significant thing different than in any of my previous years of farming wheat,” he says.

He applied the silica-based product on wheat at planting last fall and again before the rains started in April.

Will need less nitrogen

“One thing we found out is we will need less nitrogen on the Quick-Sol-treated wheat, and I think some of the yield loss we saw came because of lodging, which was the result of too much nitrogen,” Hagler says.

This year he sprayed all his wheat with Quick-Sol and plans to cut back on the nitrogen. “I can pay for the Quick Sol with the money I save on nitrogen,” he says.

Scotland County, N.C., is the center of Hagler’s farming operation and seems to be the epicenter this year for the historic rainfall. Hagler planted his largest corn crop ever this year and feared the worst as it sat through the record rains.

Again, he was pleasantly surprised at how well his yields turned out on fields that survived the excessive rain.

“We had some fields that were totally washed out and had very low yield, but on the fields that survived we were above the state average on yield and the quality turned out surprisingly well,” he says.

Along the edges of some of our corn fields we picked some that was in the 160 bushel per acre range. Then, in the middle of the field, we picked zero.

“This year it seems that even a three-inch drop in elevation from the outer rows to the middle of the field meant the difference between making a good crop and making no crop,” he adds.

Cotton, about 2,000 acres of it, is another story. There is no uniformity to the cotton crop. It was typical across most of the cotton producing areas of the Carolinas to have some by September that was chest high and spindly and some that was still blooming.

“We’ve had so many days with rain, long stretches with cloudy, overcast conditions and low temperatures and cotton just doesn’t grow under those kinds of conditions,” the North Carolina grower says.

“We may have some average yield on our cotton in Scotland and Robeson counties, but not in Hoke County,” he adds.

Mother nature picked her spots

As in most areas of the Southeast, Mother Nature picked her spots to inundate with rainfall and getting 10-12 inches in a week versus 3-4 inches will make the difference between having a crop and not having a cotton crop, Hagler says.

“In Hoke County there is a lot of real estate between cotton plants. As the old saying goes you can hide more cotton on a tall plant than you can pick on a small one,” he says.

“In Hoke County this year, there are too many small plants — the math just doesn’t work when you try to figure out you can make a good crop on that cotton.”

The biggest gamble and the biggest ‘first’ this year for Hagler was getting his wheat out a month or more late and getting double-crop beans in at least a month late. His latest beans were planted behind wheat on Aug. 5.

Typically, he has all his wheat out and all his double-crop beans in by the last week in June, giving soybeans plenty of time to mature before the first frost comes. This year it’s a real gamble, and the North Carolina grower knows the risks all too well.

“Planting soybeans in August is like a lot of decisions we had to make this year — you just go with your gut feeling and pray everything works out all right,” he says.

rroberson@farmpress.com

Source URL: <http://southeastfarmpress.com/grains/bryan-hagler-forced-farm-around-record-rainfall-2013>