

2025 Hard Winter Wheat Tour Sponsored by the Wheat Quality Council

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MANHATTAN, KAN. — The hard red winter wheat crop is in good shape after April-May rains cut short a worrisome dry period, but the expanding occurrence of wheat streak mosaic and the effects of the earlier drought will limit the crop in the top production state of Kansas.

Those were the findings after six dozen crop scouts appraised and took measurements in 449 wheat fields from May 13 to 15 on the Wheat Quality Council's 67th annual Hard Winter Wheat Tour.

Measurements of row spacing, height, wheat heads, spikelets and kernels were entered in a formula crafted by the US Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service, resulting in an average yield projection of 53 bus per acre, up 6.5 bus from 46.5 bus as the 2024 tour average with an identical three-day field stop total of 449 fields. The projection compared with the USDA's yield forecast released May 12 projecting a 50 bus per acre average yield, up from 43 bus in 2024.

Hard red winter wheat production in Kansas could fall below the USDA's May 12 production projection of 345 million bus that, if realized, would be a 12% increase from the state's 2024 production. Individual scout estimates of Kansas winter wheat production in 2025 were made by 54 of the 66 scouts who took part in the tour. The average of those projections was 338.5 million bus, 2% lower than the USDA projection.

Scouts issued projections after viewing numerous abandoned fields and others that looked to have been grazed and cut for hay or silage.

Romulo Lollato, a wheat and forages extension specialist with K-State Extension, summarized the moisture timeline since planting in Kansas.

"Moisture around planting is very important," he said. "There was some rainfall in September, particularly in southwest and south-central Kansas, but the majority of the state was very dry. In January through March, Kansas was very dry. Plant canopies were green on top but very yellow close to the ground, a sign of drought stress, and by mid-April we were very dry. Moisture improved at that time, but there are still areas of drought stress even though these past three to four weeks have been favorable in term of moisture."

The most prominent viral disease affecting this year's crop is wheat streak mosaic, which can limit yield potential by inhibiting photosynthesis, said Kelsey Anderson Onofre, assistant professor in the department of plant pathology at Kansas State University.

“This is a disease that can be pretty devastating,” she said. “It is seen in other parts of the country, but here in the high Plains, we really are at ground zero for this particular disease. Wheat can look yellow from the road and it tends to be less affected further into the field. Up close, it presents as a classic yellow-green mosaic pattern on the leaves and it’s vectored by the microscopic wheat curl mite.”

At nightly tour meetings, officials from adjacent states issued wheat updates.

Royce Schaneman, executive director at Nebraska Wheat Board, said planting season was dry, forcing growers to “dust in” the crop or wait for rain.

“Stands are really variable,” he said. “A lot of wheat put in late barely germinated and didn’t come up until this spring. Some early planting emerged but with variable moisture, stands were spotty. Weather has stayed consistently dry. (Nebraska farmers) planted 970,000 acres, the USDA expects harvest acreage is 850,000 acres. A producer in our largest wheat county, Cheyenne in the southern Panhandle, said upwards of 15% of wheat in that region will be abandoned and that number seems to be growing. Just too dry with poor stands.”

Brad Erker, executive director at Colorado Wheat filed a report for the meeting. He said Colorado farmers planted 2.1 million acres and is forecasted by the USDA to harvest 1.88 million acres with an average of 38 bus per acre for a 71.4 million bus crop. Colorado Wheat is slightly less optimistic with a 68 million bus projection.

Dennis Schoenhals with the Oklahoma Wheat Growers Association said that state’s crop would be similar to 2024 after receiving about three inches of rain near the Panhandle and up to 7 inches in the central part of the Sooner State.

“The rain came at a pretty good time when most of the Oklahoma crop was heading out,” he said. “Last week’s statewide crop tour came up with a total projection of 101.1 million bus production on a 35.9 bus average yield over 2.8 million acres.” MBN