Record US maize harvest?

This season's maize crop was the largest the USA had ever seen, exceeding earlier government projections, but lower than some analysts had predicted, journalstar.com reported. Maize futures prices dropped to a three-year low before the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) report came out, but recovered. In its first report since the government shut down in October, the USDA said it expected a harvest of 353.3 million tons of maize. The previous record was 332.7 million tons delivered in 2009. The USDA's projected season-average farm price range for maize was lowered US$0.80c at both ends to a range of US$161.40c (R1 614.00) to US$122.90c (R1 925.00).

It expected yield to average 10.066/ha, the second-highest on record. Livestock feed was projected to be the top use of US maize, with 132 million tons of consumption. According to estimates, 124 million tons of maize would be used to make ethanol and animal feed co-products, according to the Renewable Fuels Association.

- Staff reporter

Late rain causes switch from maize to soya bean

Forecasts for soya bean plantings in Argentina's 2013/2014 season may rise from the current estimate of 20.2 million hectares, due to an extension of planting into fields that had been reserved for other crops, the Buenos Aires Grain Exchange said, according to Reuters. Winter and the start of spring were dry, and heavy rains in the past weeks were too late for planting maize and sunflower in some regions. These areas could now be replaced by soya beans. Argentina is the world's top soya oil and soya meal exporter, and the third-largest soya bean and maize supplier in the world.

"Our current forecast could see some changes during the next weeks because of the increase in soya bean planting in fields initially planned for sunflowers," the exchange said in its weekly crop report. It said its sunflower area estimate was cut to 1.48 million hectares for the 2013/2014 season, from the previous 1.63 million.

"Soya could also expand into maize fields that could not be planted in the central agriculture region."

By last week, farmers had only planted about 39% of the 3.46 million hectares intended for commercial-use maize.

Soya bean sowing started a few weeks ago and farmers have planted 10.7% of the intended area.

- Staff reporter

US horse abattoirs can continue operating

A US federal judge cleared the way for horse abattoirs to resume operating in the country this week, prodailytimes.com reported. US District Judge Christina Armijo in Albuquerque threw out a lawsuit by the Humane Society of the USA and other animal protection groups that alleged the US Department of Agriculture had failed to conduct proper environmental studies when it issued permits to Valley Meat Co. in Roswell, New Mexico, and an Iowa company to slaughter horses for human consumption.

In Oklahoma, a bill to allow such abattoirs was approved by the legislature and signed by the governor earlier this year. The decision brought to an end a two-year battle by Valley Meat to open its abattoir.

The Humane Society, joined by the state of New Mexico, filed an almost immediate appeal to the 10th US Circuit Court of Appeals in Denver.

- Staff reporter

A million Philippine farmers affected by typhoon

Over one million farmers in the Philippines were severely affected by Typhoon Haiyan, according to the UN. The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) said thousands of hectares of rice had been destroyed, BBC News reported.

Coconut plantations, a big earner of foreign currency, were said to be "completely flattened". Fishing communities were also affected as boats and equipment were destroyed. The FAO estimated the number of farmers affected by studying the pathway the storm took as it crossed the country, and from an analysis of data provided by the government.

"That area is the major rice-producing area for the Philippines," FAO's Jeff Tschirley told BBC News. "They've just finished their harvest and because it is not modernised production, they are still drying it, but we suspect there is a lot of rice that is vulnerable to having been impacted by the storms."

Coconuts account for nearly half the Philippines' agricultural exports and the country is the world's biggest producer of coconut oil.

- Staff reporter

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