



*Hard Winter Wheat Tour Summary by Ben Handcock*

### **2014 Wheat Quality Council Hard Winter Tour Completed**

Twenty cars with 74 crop scouts surveyed and evaluated the potential of the Kansas wheat crop the week of April 28-May 1, 2014. The total number of field stops was 587 compared to 570 one year ago. This year the weather was sort of ugly the first day and better the last two.

The participants attended a brief training and tour overview session in Manhattan on the evening of April 28 before enjoying a great steak fry. The dinner was held at the Rambler's Steak House in Manhattan.

**Day one** saw the 20 cars traveling on six different routes from Manhattan to Colby. (See tour map). The wheat seemed pretty consistent on most routes in the Central portion of the state, with the drought being very evident. The Nebraska route found good wheat in the south Central. As the routes moved farther west, the drought became even more evident. Yields for the day ranged from 16-64 bushels per acre with the day one average on all routes at 34.7 bushels. This compares with 43.8 bushels one year ago. We stopped in 271 fields on day one. A group scouted eastern Colorado and reported a yield average of 32 bushels and estimated a total production of 80 million bushels for 2014. The NE Wheat Board estimated their production at 45 bushels and 67.5 million total.

**Day Two** the cars traveled from Colby to Wichita. Several cars went into the far western Kansas counties and three cars actually covered the northern tier of Oklahoma counties. The western Kansas area was reported as being still very dry, but with yields comparable to the rest of the state for a change. The cars in Oklahoma found the lowest yields of the day in very dry fields. The day two average was 30.8 bushels per acre compared to 40.5 in 2013. We had a range from 7-63 bushels and made 271 stops. Oklahoma reported an estimated 18.5 bushels per acre and a total production of 66.5 million bushels. This compares with 115 million bushels last year.

**Day Three** concluded the trip with the cars traveling from Wichita to Kansas City. We lost some cars and a few people in Wichita and made 45 stops on a shortened day. This smaller production area does not have a significant impact on the state-wide average, but is usually a high yielding area. Yields ranged from 18-56 bushels with the day three average at 37.8 compared to 52.3 last year. This area did not fare much better than the rest of the state.

**The Calculated Average** for the entire tour was **33.2** bushels per acre compared to 41.1 bushels on the same routes in 2013. The scouts use a formula provided by KS Ag Statistics to arrive at

their calculated average. The formula is based on a 10-year rolling average and changes slightly from year to year.

**The Estimated Production** for the Kansas crop by 55 participants who joined the pool this year is 260.7 million bushels compared to our 2013 estimate of 313.1. These people base their estimates on yield estimates and acres expected to be harvested. There are always a number of abandoned acres and they attempt to factor that into the equation. KS Ag Statistics will release their official estimate of the crop on May 9. Watch for it and see if we are reasonably close.

**My personal observations, for what they're worth, are as follows:**

*Most of the state is still seriously short of moisture. I arrived in Kansas expecting to see the drought effects, and that's what I saw. As the tour progressed, I became more convinced that the crop would be much lower than average. I believe our 33.2 bushel average was appropriate for the 3 days we looked at it, but will likely be too high. The 10-year average for Kansas is around 332 million bushels. Our estimators, at 260.7 are well below that number, and I believe even that number is too high. I don't believe I have ever seen wheat heading out at 8-12 inches tall. I split the stems and tried to count the number of rows of kernels and they were in the 7-8 range for the most part. This, in itself, will likely result in 20% lower yields. With the heat and winds the crop has experienced since last Thursday, I believe we have already lost some yield potential. If the kernels do fill, I would expect to see higher protein and lower test weights. This remains to be seen. At any rate, it will be very difficult to harvest, and probably won't be destroyed due to the increased chances of wind erosion. It's also too short to make a hay bale.*

*The producers in the western part of the state have a chance to have approximately the same yields as the rest of the state this year. The Central part of the state usually makes up for some shortfalls elsewhere, but I don't see that potential this year.*

Please keep in mind that this whole tour is a snapshot in time regarding the potential of this crop. Thirty-seven of our 74 participants were first-timers. They reported learning a lot about wheat while having a good time doing it. The value of this exercise is the people you meet and the friends you make and keep in contact with over the years to come. Although I think we did a good job of estimating the crop potential that really takes a back seat to the real value of the tour. This was truly a very diverse group of very nice people. I was especially pleased to see 4 young producers on this tour. We need more of that.

Thanks to all who sent employees, provided cars and helped in many ways to make this tour a success. I look forward to your support on our 58<sup>th</sup> annual Wheat Quality Council Hard Winter Wheat Tour.

**Please share this information with others in your organization that may not be on our email list!!!**

Remember our Hard Spring and Durum tour coming up on July 21-24. This tour covers North Dakota plus parts of Minnesota and South Dakota. A few brave souls might venture near the Montana border to look for a few more Durum fields to report on. The format is very similar to

the winter tour, and registration forms are available on our web site at [www.wheatqualitycouncil.org](http://www.wheatqualitycouncil.org). Get your registrations in as soon as possible. The hotel rooms in Devils Lake get hard to come by. You can always cancel your room if something comes up.

The wheat in that part of the country could be pretty good this year if they can get it planted in a somewhat timely manner. They certainly have good moisture to start with.

Hope to see some of you in Fargo.