



*Hard Winter Wheat Tour Summary by Ben Handcock*

### **2015 Wheat Quality Council Hard Winter Tour Completed**

Twenty-two cars with 88 crop scouts surveyed and evaluated the potential of the Kansas wheat crop the week of May 4-7, 2015. The total number of field stops was 659 compared to 587 one year ago. This year the weather was muddy most of the time, making things more difficult.

The participants attended a brief training and tour overview session in Manhattan on the evening of May 4 before enjoying a great steak fry. The dinner was held at Rambler's Steak House in Manhattan.

**Day One** saw the 22 cars traveling on six different routes from Manhattan to Colby. (See tour map). The wheat seemed pretty good on most routes in the Central portion of the state, with the drought being very evident. The Nebraska route found fair wheat in the south Central averaging about 34 bu/acre. As the routes moved farther west, the drought became even more evident. Yields for the day ranged from 12-76 bushels per acre with the day one average on all routes at 34.3 bushels. This compares with 34.7 bushels one year ago. We stopped in 284 fields on day one. A group scouted eastern Colorado and reported a yield average of 38 bushels and estimated a total production of 89.3 million bushels for 2015. The NE Wheat Board estimated their production at 37 bushels and 54.4 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. The cars in Oklahoma found better wheat this year than for the past several years. The day two average was 34.5 bushels per acre compared to 30.8 in 2014. We had a range from 0-79 bushels and made 305 stops. Oklahoma reported an estimated 29.4 bushels per acre and a total production of 111.7 million bushels. This compares with 47.6 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 70 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 20-95 bushels with the day three average at 48.9 compared to 37.8 last year.

**The Calculated Average** for the entire tour was **35.9** bushels per acre compared to 33.2 bushels on the same routes in 2014. 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 **53** participants who joined the pool this year is **288.5** million bushels compared to our 2014 estimate of 260.7. 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 12. 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 lower than average. I believe our 35.9 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 288.5 are well below that number, and I believe our number is really good. Like last year, we saw wheat heading out at 12-15 inches tall. I split the stems on wheat in the boot 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 result in lower yields. There has been some rain in most parts of Kansas over the past week or two, and that will definitely help this crop. If the kernels do fill, I would expect to see higher protein and lower test weights, especially in the West. This remains to be seen. We saw a lot of stripe rust almost every place, and the wetter cool weather will probably not help the disease issues that are present in places.*

Please keep in mind that this whole tour is a snapshot in time regarding the potential of this crop. Fifty-three of our 88 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. We had a large contingent of foreign visitors, and that was good to see.

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 59<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 27-30. 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. Hope to see you in Fargo.