



Hard Winter Wheat Tour Summary by Ben Handcock

2016 Wheat Quality Council Hard Winter Tour Completed

Twenty-two cars with 82 crop scouts surveyed and evaluated the potential of the Kansas wheat crop the week of May 2-5, 2016. The total number of field stops was 655 compared to 659 one year ago. This year the weather was as beautiful as you could ask for, with mud in some places.

The participants attended a brief training and tour overview session in Manhattan on the evening of May 2 before enjoying a great steak buffet. The dinner was held at McGraws Blue Hills Room in Manhattan.

Day One saw the **22** cars traveling on six different routes from Manhattan to Colby. (See tour map). The wheat was excellent on these routes in the Central portion of the state. The Nebraska route found good wheat in the south Central averaging 42.7 bu/acre. As the routes moved farther west, the wheat was the best in recent memory. Yields for the day ranged from 21-93 bushels per acre with the day one average on all routes at 47.2 bushels. This compares with 34.3 bushels one year ago. We stopped in 306 fields on day one. A group scouted eastern Colorado and reported a yield average of 39 bushels and estimated a total production of 78 million bushels for 2016. The NE Wheat Board estimated their production at 55 bushels and 70.4 million total.

Day Two, 20 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 is estimated to be the best in years. The cars in Oklahoma found better wheat this year than last year, as they moved east. The day two average was 49.3 bushels per acre compared to 34.5 in 2015. We had a range from 16-107 (irrigated) bushels and made 300 stops. Oklahoma reported an estimated 33.6 bushels per acre and a total production of 128.5 million bushels. This compares with 98.8 million bushels estimated at this time last year.

Day Three concluded the trip with **17** cars traveling from Wichita to Manhattan. We lost some cars and a few people in Wichita and made 49 stops on a shortened day. We changed the routes this year to end at our starting point in Manhattan. This smaller production area does not have a strong impact on the state-wide average, but is usually a high yielding area. Yields ranged from 16-90 bushels with the day three average at 53.5 compared to 48.9 last year.

The Calculated Average for the entire tour was **48.6** bushels per acre compared to 35.9 bushels on basically the same routes in 2015. The scouts use a formula provided by NASS 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 **57** participants who joined the pool this year is **382.4** million bushels compared to our 2014 estimate of 288.5. 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. NASS will release their official estimate of the crop on May 10, I believe. Watch for it and see if we are reasonably close.

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

I think this crop has the best potential in years. We heard about drought areas, freeze damaged areas and tremendous disease pressure. We were hard pressed to find freeze damage, almost everywhere seemed to have adequate moisture and planes were everywhere spraying fungicide to control the disease. It just proved once again that rain cures all ills. I was pleasantly surprised to see the degree of care being demonstrated by the producers. With wheat prices where they are, it take a lot of guts to do it right, but they are doing what needs to be done. That will have a significant effect on both the yield and the quality of this crop. Great job guys!!!

As always when yield potential is high, there was a lot of talk about what the protein levels will be. I would expect them to be a bit lower than ideal, but test weights and other factors should be pretty good. This is probably the earliest crop I've seen. We are usually counting tillers all of the first day, and this year we were counting heads in almost every field. I would estimate that we are about two weeks ahead of normal in maturity in the North, but it didn't appear to be that much earlier in the South, for some reason.

I am really pleased with our 382.4 million bushel estimate. I suspect we will be very close to the number that NASS will put out in August. It's hard to believe how well these people estimate the crop without a lot of experience to draw on. I think this just proves how much at least one tour veteran in each car can teach people in a short period of time.

Please keep in mind that this whole tour is a snapshot in time regarding the potential of this crop. Forty of our 82 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 really 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 60th annual Wheat Quality Council Hard Winter Wheat Tour, although I won't be there.

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 25-28. 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. 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.