Quality A Concern As Soybean Harvest Begins

ST. LOUIS, Mo. — U.S. soybean farmers are reporting price discounts as high as \$2 per bushel on early sales of 1988 droughtdamaged soybeans. Some farmers report buyers are rejecting soybeans of exceptionally poor quality.

The recently enacted 1988 drought relief legislation gives USDA discretionary authority to provide "additional disaster payments to producers of such crops that suffer losses resulting from the reduced quality of such crops caused by drought".

A spokesman for U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Richard Lyng told the American Soybean Association (ASA) the Secretary may not use his discretionary authority to make payments based on poor soybean quality.

In a letter today, ASA President James Lee Adams urged Secretary Lyng to act quickly to exercise his authority and provide soybean farmers disaster payments based on soybean quality at harvest.

"Damage discounts can be just as devastating as the loss of production," says Adams. "Farmers who have drought loss are hurt a second time when quality discounts are imposed. We intend to aggressively pursue this issue in weeks ahead."

Jim Guinn, ASA technical director of soybean quality, says reports of poor quality are of great concern, not only because of financial hardship to affected farmers, but also because of the impact on customers. In the current competitive environment, he says a poor quality crop could encourage customers to turn to alternative vegetable oil sources.

Guinn recommends that where drought is a problem, farmers take a sample of beans to their buyer for analysis before delivering full

"In fact," says Guinn, "farmers in drought areas would be wise to

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carefully evaluate both quality and yield before deciding whether to proceed with harvest. It may not be economical to harvest some of these drought damaged beans."

"Farmers who do harvest drought damaged beans have some options," says Guinn. "Livestock producers can produce damaged soybeans for on-farm use. Soybean Association funded university studies have proven that heat processed whole soybeans (even when weather damaged) are very effective in livestock and poultry rations. Spending a little time comparing the cost of on-farm use of full-fat soybeans versus delivering the crop and taking a discount, could make money for soybean farmers this year.

Guinn says this year's drought apparently caused soybean plants to die off before the beans were fully mature. The result is a bean that may look normal on the outside, but is visibly green on the inside.

"This causes real problems for processors, because the high chlorophyll content produces a green oil which requires more processing," says Guinn. "In addition, the drought damaged beans have a higher level of free fatty acids, resulting in increased processing losses."

Guinn says ASA is working closely with the Federal Grain Inspection Service (FGIS) to monitor areas where quality problems seem the greatest. He notes that over half of the U.S. soybean crop is exported and the quality needs of foreign customers are especially important in the current competitive oilseed market.

He cautions farmers against storing this year's drought damaged soybeans. "The old saying 'don't store a short crop' is more than just economic advice based on supply and demand," says Guinn. "Poor quality soybeans don't store well."

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