

State Crop Disaster Aid Is Sought By Alexander

Gov. Lamar Alexander Friday requested Secretary of Agriculture John R. Block to declare a statewide agricultural disaster area in Tennessee where crop losses in excess of \$428 million are expected as a result of the summer drought.

The request was made in a letter delivered personally to Secretary Block by Agriculture Commissioner Bill Walker. He has completed a statewide survey of agricultural damage at Gov. Alexander's instructions and brought that report to federal officials in a meeting with representatives from drought-stricken states at Chicago.

"This information indicates that Tennessee farmers this year will have their worst crops in the past 50 years," Gov. Alexander noted. "Because of the unprecedented losses and the resulting economic stress, I have requested federal disaster assistance for the State of Tennessee be made available through a Secretarial Decla-

ration." Half of the state's soybean crop - the state's number one farm crop - has been lost due to adverse weather conditions, Commissioner Walker reported to the governor. Based on a current price of \$8.50 per bushel, the estimated production loss of 23,040,000 bushels of soybeans would mean a dollar loss of \$195,840,000 to Tennessee farmers.

Corn losses range from a low of 15% to a high of 90% in counties across the state, with a statewide average loss of 57%. The estimated financial loss to Tennessee farmers in corn production is \$100,620,000.

Burley tobacco has been affected more severely than the dark types, Walker said. The county-by-county survey found losses ranging from 15% to 70% and a statewide average of 41%. Based on last year's season average price the loss to tobacco crops in Tennessee would amount to \$87.6 million.

Although cotton is generally considered a hot weather crop,

this year's extreme conditions are expected to reduce the yield by an average of 46% statewide and will cost cotton growers an estimated \$34,104,000.

Walker said other losses include \$8 million to the state's sorghum crop and severe damage to fall hay crops and pastures. Hay production is expected to be about one-fourth of the normal crop, and pasture losses are averaging more than 60% across the state.

"Nearly 700,000 cattle and more than 100,000 hogs are receiving additional supplements due to the hot, dry conditions," Commissioner Walker reported. "More than 100,000 broilers have died this summer due to the weather conditions. Milk production also has dropped considerably due to the heat."

Walker said vegetable crops, particularly those in the Cumberland Plateau area, will have yields from 30% to 60% below normal as a result of the extended drought and extreme heat.

In the survey, each county

emergency board was asked to recommend what type of USDA assistance would be beneficial. Emergency credit was recommended by 73 of Tennessee's 95 counties. Fifty-nine counties recommended feed assistance, and 35 recommended the emergency conservation programs.

Walker said some livestock producers began selling their cattle in August due to poor pasture conditions.

Prospects are likely to improve, he concluded.

Weatherwise, 1983 has been a disaster for Tennessee farmers, Walker pointed out. "The 1983 crop year got off to a slow start as a result of the

overly abundant rainfall occurring during April and May," the commissioner said. "Also, a freeze in late April delayed planting of cotton and corn, damaged fruits and vegetables, and adversely affected tobacco beds and small grains."

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