

Frederick, Ok.-Members of the Oklahoma Cotton Council, who represent producers, ginner and warehousemen, are taking seriously producer survey predictions of large increases in cotton acreage across the Sooner State and surrounding areas.

Harvey Schroeder, OCC exec. dir., explains there are several reasons, including the National Cotton Council producer survey, why more farmers are expected to either increase their cotton acres or get into the cotton production business as a new endeavor.

"There is a big demand for cotton around the world right now," Schroeder said. "Increased demand has depleted the world supply of cotton and in response, cotton prices have increased. At the same time, NCC statistics are telling us, cotton acreage will increase in the Southwestern area which is Texas, Oklahoma and Kansas.

"It is predicted cotton acreage in these three states will make up almost 55 percent of the cotton grown in the US in 2010. Oklahoma's cotton acreage could increase as much as 25 percent, compared to last year."

Plains Cotton Cooperative Assn., headquartered in Lubbock, Tx., has cotton storage warehouses in Texas, Oklahoma and Kansas. Recent increases in cotton production in the three states encouraged PCCA to increase their storage capacity.

However, a significant increase in cotton production in the three state areas this year could strain the farmer-owned organization's current storage capacity.

Jay Cowart, manager of the PCCA cotton storage warehouse in Altus, Ok., says, "The stronger cotton prices and weaker grain prices have caused a lot of farmers in our trade territory to look at increasing their cotton acres or planting cotton for the first time in quite a few years.

"The moisture situation throughout our growing area is as good as many people can remember it ever being. A very large percentage of cotton yields in our area are determined by the moisture we have available at the beginning of the season. Great moisture conditions and much improved economics have us planning for a crop that will probably exceed our storage capacity."

2010 could be another record year for cotton ginner.

Jeannie Hileman, manager, Farmers Cooperative Gin, Carnegie, Ok. is anticipating some more big production numbers.

"Our board members were talking about the expected 25 percent increase in Oklahoma cotton acreage this year," she said. "Of course, that is acres, not bales at the end of the season we are talking about; there is a lot of weather to get through before harvest.

"But we have plenty of subsurface moisture in dryland cotton fields right now; an excellent start before planting begins. We are looking at our need for more gin machinery. Last year, we ginned 60 percent more bales than the year before. Another 25-6 percent this year would stretch our capacity to take care of our clients.

"And the excellent outlook for cotton prices this year would give our farmers a good opportunity to get good prices for a cotton crop that would help them rotate their wheat ground, get rid of persistent weeds that affect winter wheat and also let the cotton plant's taproot improve the tilth of their fields." Increased cotton acres are expected in far southwestern Oklahoma, according to Barney Trammell, manager of the Eldorado, Ok., Farmers Cooperative Assn., Eldorado, Ok.

"We are looking at a 30 percent increase in cotton acreage here this year, about 2,000 more acres," he said. "That doesn't include what farmers might do with wheat ground after they harvest this spring.

There will be more acres planted to cotton that was in wheat because of the good cotton prices now being discussed."

Farther east in Tillman County, David Lingle, gin manager for the Tillman Producers Cooperative, Frederick, Ok., is still surveying what expected changes in cotton production will do there, but he sees some definite changes coming:

"We are still checking out what will happen. We know the NCC producer's survey predicts a cotton planting increase over 25 percent in Oklahoma. Here in Tillman County, the winter wheat fields are still too wet for farmers to fertilize the crop. If they aren't able to top dress for increased yields, we will see lots of cotton planted behind the wheat.

"And there is a lot of corn planted here to be harvested for dairy cattle feed. The corn must be planted next month. If fields are still too wet for corn to be planted, there will be even more cotton planted. But it is still too early to know how much extra cotton will be planted here. I know we have had some good turnouts with farmers attending our cottonseed meetings, so we know there is a lot of interest in growing the crop this year."

In western Oklahoma, Ryan Sawatsky, manager of the Burns Flat, Ok., Cooperative Assn., sees more cotton being grown along I-40 where his clients farm.

"We will see an increase of about 30 percent in cotton acreage for here," he said. "Most of it will be farmers already growing cotton and there will be some farmers just starting to grow the crop. Most of the acreage has been laid out, anticipating planting to cotton this spring.

"We ginned 6,000 bales in 2009, twice the amount in 2008. An increase of 30 percent in cotton acreage this spring will probably give us more bales in the fall, but I don't know how much yet."