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ILLINOIS FARM AND FOOD OUTLOOK

COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS

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U.S. CROPLAND IS NEAR RECORD ACREAGE

ACCORDING TO THE USDA'S JUNE ACREAGE REPORT, U.S. farmers have planted or intend to plant 352.7 million acres of cropland this year. These intentions represent a 2.5-million-acre increase from April and an 11-million-acre increase from last year. Cropland acres were reduced somewhat last year because of participation in the land set-aside and diversion programs. However, intended plantings this year are about 2 million acres greater than in 1977 when no land was taken out of production under government programs.

Soybean plantings were placed at a record 71.6 million acres, an increase of 2.8 million acres from April intentions and an increase of 7.6 million acres from last year. At 79.7 million acres, corn plantings are up 0.5 million acres from April intentions and about unchanged from last year. If these intentions fully materialize, the acreage of soybeans harvested will exceed that of corn for the first time.

Wheat acreage is up 5.1 million acres, with most of the increase coming in winter wheat. Sunflower plantings are estimated at 5.3 million acres, compared to 2.8 million last year.

The planted acreage of feed grains other than corn has been reduced by about 5 million acres, or 12 percent, from last year. The largest decrease, 2.3 million acres, was registered for oats. At 117.5 million acres, the area devoted to all feed grains is 4 percent less than last year and the smallest since 1972.

The June acreage report contained two surprises: the large increase in soybean acreage and the increase in total cropland. Soybean plantings have increased from last year in every major producing state. Except in Alabama and Tennessee, plantings have also been greater than April intentions. The largest acreage increases are in Minnesota, Missouri, Illinois, and Iowa.

In Minnesota, soybean plantings have increased by a whopping 1.2 million acres from last year. Sunflower plantings are 690 thousand acres above last year. The expansion in oilseeds came at the expense of spring wheat, barley, and oats. In addition, total cropland had increased by 834 thousand acres.

Cropland in Illinois has expanded by about 610 thousand acres from last year. Soybean plantings have increased by 550 thousand acres, and wheat is up 310 thousand acres. Both corn and oats were reduced somewhat from last year.

Missouri farmers planted 700 acres more soybeans and 820 thousand acres more wheat than a year ago. Almost all of that expansion represents a net increase in cropland from last year.

In Iowa, the 600-thousand-acre increase in soybeans and the 200-thousand-acre increase in corn came at the expense of oats and hay. In addition, cropland has expanded by 260 thousand acres.

IMPLICATIONS. The total area of nonhay cropland in 1979 is placed at 289.6 million acres. The largest plantings were in 1949, at 295.6 million acres. The increase from last year is not as great as the amount of land that was idle under

poultry meat in the United States in 1979 will total about 6 million tons. Major investments in Russia are being made in very large production units like those that have long existed in the United States.

All studies of the Soviet economy indicate a strong consumer demand for more meat of a higher quality. There are also indications from Russian scholars that the political pressure to satisfy this demand is great. Some observers of the Russian scene believe that the lack of meat is a volatile matter which could cause public protests. The successor to Mr. Brezhnev will probably have to put emphasis on more and better meat.

The most serious shortage limiting meat production in Russia is not grain but protein supplements. The precise level of protein consumption by USSR animal agriculture is not known, but we do know that it is woefully short by U.S. and European standards. The Russians are not going to make much progress on their meat-production problem until the use of protein supplements is increased. Protein production in Russia is small and there is virtually no potential for increase.

The next major incursion of Russia into the world agricultural commodity markets may be for protein, which can only take the form of soybeans and soybean meal.

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