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Spain

Grain and Feed

Heavy Rains Delay Spanish Winter Grain Planting 2003

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Report Highlights:

Heavy rains are washing out the prospects for a big 2004 winter grain crop. Castilla-Leon, the country's most important production area, has been especially hard hit.

Includes PSD Changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
Unscheduled Report
Madrid [SP1]
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Heavy Rains Delay Spanish Winter Grain Planting

During the past two months, unusually wet weather has been prevalent throughout most of the central, northern and western regions of the Iberian Peninsula. Since the beginning of October, total precipitation has been above 12 inches in most of winter grain areas – which is three-to-four times the normal rainfall for this period. The weather forecast indicates more rain for the next few days.

The rains have caused muddy field conditions that are hampering or delaying planting in most of grain areas. According to farmer sources, about 30 percent of Spain's winter grain area remains unplanted. The situation is particularly difficult Castilla-Leon, the most important grain producing area, where about 40 percent of area remains unplanted. Farmers who were able to seed their fields are also reporting problems with losses of fertilizers, swamping and weed development.

Spanish farmers were expecting to substantially increase the area planted to winter wheat. With the reduction in the EU Set Aside (from 10 to 5 percent) and the big shift of land out of sunflower production, forecasters were predicting that an additional 600,000 hectares would be planted to winter wheat. This would have brought the total to 2.8 million hectares, compared to last season's 2.22 million hectares.

This prediction now appears to be out of reach, especially for Castilla-Leon. Even if the rains stop immediately, the heavy soils in the region will take about two weeks to dry out enough to permit field work to proceed. By that time, the window for planting winter wheat will have closed. Many farmers are now discussing the pros and cons of spring barley, which is planted in late January. This crop has lower yields than winter grains and is also risky to grow in the high, cold elevations of Castilla-Leon where late spring frosts are common.

The wet weather is hampering also the harvesting of cotton, corn, sugar beet and olive oil. In northern areas of Spain, 60 percent of corn and sugar beets remain un-harvested.