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Production of Basic Foodstuffs Sets Record in Autumn-Winter Cycle

by: LADB Staff
Category/Department: Mexico
Published: 1994-06-22

In early June, the Agriculture Secretariat (Secretaría de Agricultura y Recursos Hidraulicos, SARH) announced that production of basic foodstuffs during the autumn 1993-winter 1994 cycle reached 7.9 million metric tons. Describing the harvest for the cycle as "excellent," deputy agriculture secretary Ernesto Enriquez explained that total production for the period is more than twice the 3.5 million MT produced in the same cycle a year ago. The total included four million MT of corn, which is nearly twice as high as the 2.1 million MT produced a year ago. Wheat production totaled 3.6 million MT, compared with 3.3 million MT in the same period in 1993. In addition, a total of 350,000 MT of beans were produced during the cycle, compared with 204,000 MT a year ago.

In an interview with La Jornada, Jose Zamorano Ulloa, an agricultural analyst at Bancomer, explained that a large increase in area planted in corn accounted for most of the total gain in production. According to Ulloa, over the past nine years, producers have reduced the amount of land devoted to such crops as wheat, rice, sorghum, soybeans, cotton, and sesame, in favor of increased corn and bean plantings. In fact, Zamorano noted that total corn production has increased by four million MT since 1985, while production of the other crops declined by 6.3 million MT during the same period.

According to a Bancomer study, wheat production for the entire year including both the autumn-winter and spring-summer cycles declined to four million MT during 1993, compared to 5.2 million MT in 1985. During the same time period, the amount of farmland devoted to wheat declined from 1.2 million hectares to about 900,000 ha. The report pointed to a similar trend in soybean production, when total output reached 468,000 MT in 1993, compared with one million MT in 1985. Land devoted to soybean cultivation declined from 500,000 ha. in 1985 to 240,000 ha. in 1993. The increase in the area planted with corn has resulted in record corn crops in recent years, which in turn has tended to reduce the price farmers receive for that commodity.

For the 1992-1993 season, Mexico produced a record corn harvest of 18 million MT, compared with 15.6 million MT the year before (see SourceMex 01/05/94). In October of 1993, President Carlos Salinas de Gortari announced a new agricultural support program (Programa de Apoyos Directos al Campo, Procampo) designed to encourage farmers to produce less corn in favor of crops destined for the export market, such as fruits and vegetables. The program replaced guaranteed prices with subsidies for production and marketing. However, some agricultural analysts suggest the program was announced too late to have much impact on production for the autumn-winter cycle.

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