

Arkansas Designated a Primary Peanut Producer

CHRISTINA HUYNH, Associated Press

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (AP) — Arkansas is getting a little nutty.

The Natural State has produced an average of at least 10,000 tons of peanuts within the past three years, and it's now getting some recognition for it. The National Peanut Board announced Monday that the state has been designated a primary peanut-producing state and will be granted membership on the U.S. board.

Arkansas' Agriculture Secretary Butch Calhoun said he's pleased with the peanut-status upgrade, adding that Arkansas has the soil, water and climate needed for the crop's cultivation.

"This designation recognizes the commitment of Arkansas producers and the companies that have invested in Arkansas to continue to grow the industry and gives Arkansans a greater voice on the National Peanut Board as a full member," Calhoun said.

Arkansas will be the 11th state to gain membership. The other 10 states on the board are Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas and Virginia. There's currently one at-large board member who represents minor, peanut-producing states.

Arkansas has seen an uptick in peanut production since 2010, according to an inspection by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. In 2010, Arkansas produced 1,357 tons peanuts; 6,092 tons in 2011; 38,866 tons in 2012; and 22,947 tons in 2013.

Kyle Baltz is a peanut farmer and owner of Baltz Feed Company in Pocahontas. He and his brother Jeremy began farming peanuts in Spring 2011, and while cultivating peanuts has been hard, Baltz said it's been a profitable venture.

"The harvest has been very difficult, but the other side of that, the peanuts have been our best crop from a financial standpoint," he said.

They dedicate between 200 and 300 acres on their farm for peanuts and produce at least 2 tons of peanuts on average from their harvest, according to Baltz.

However, Travis Faske, a plant pathologist with the University of Arkansas' Agriculture Division, said it's likely that Arkansas won't see an increase in peanut production this year because of reduced peanut prices.

"In 2012, conditions were really perfect for peanuts. Everybody produced more," he said. "In 2013, because there were so many peanuts, the contracts were lower. ... There's still a lot of peanuts in storage."

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Published on Food Manufacturing (<http://www.foodmanufacturing.com>)

Faske said about 18,000 acres in Arkansas were used for peanut farming in 2012, but that figure dropped in 2013 by 6,000 acres. Still, he said, the national board's new stamp on Arkansas as a high peanut-producing state signals the strength of Arkansas farmers to develop a crop that has not been traditionally grown in the state.

"They've been consistently producing for the last three years, and I think it's a real testament to our growers," he said. "I think this is a very important thing for our state."

Source URL (retrieved on 02/28/2015 - 2:14am):

<http://www.foodmanufacturing.com/news/2014/03/arkansas-designated-primary-peanut-producer>