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Ethanol demand boosts corn planting

By Nafeesa Syeed

Associated Press Writer

DES MOINES, Iowa --

High demand from the ethanol industry and strong export sales are expected to translate this year into the biggest U.S. corn planting since 1944, according to a report released Friday.

Corn planting will be up 15 percent this year to 90.5 million acres and 12.1 million more acres than in 2006, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's annual prospective plantings report said.

Iowa remains on top with the most corn acres to be planted at 13.9 million - a 10.3 percent increase from last year.

"A lot of the producers in the Midwest are planting more corn and not as much soybean," said Greg Thessen, field crops section head for the USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service.

He said even some southern farmers are choosing corn over cotton and rice.

That switch means an 11 percent drop in soybean acres from 2006, with farmers planning to plant 67.1 million acres this year. Cotton is expected to reach 12.1 million acres, down 20 percent from 2006, and rice will drop 7 percent to 2.64 million acres.

Some grains are expected to rise. Wheat is expected to rise 5 percent with 60.3 million acres. Other increases include: sorghum, up 9 percent; canola, up 12 percent; and barley, up 7 percent.

During the first two weeks of March, the USDA asked more than 86,000 farmers across the country what they intended to plant this year. Figures of actual acres planted for the year will be released on June 29.

<http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usdahome>