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## **Early Planted Sunflowers Could Mean Higher Profits**

**Columbia, Mo. (March 4, 2003)** Farmers in southeastern Missouri have an excellent opportunity to capture high sunflower prices by planting early this year, according to Rob Myers, an agronomist and director of the Thomas Jefferson Agricultural Institute in Columbia, Mo. "Prices have been at 12 cents per pound this winter, well above average," said Myers.

Myers also says that prices may climb even higher due to tight sunflower supplies in the U.S. The short supply of sunflowers has been partly created by the increasing demand for edible sunflower oil as a source of healthy cooking oil and for use in processed foods.

Missouri producers have the opportunity to plant sunflowers in April and harvest them in August, before the crop in the Dakotas comes to market in September. This should allow Missouri growers to capture a higher price by contracting their acreage or by delivering a cash crop in August.

Current markets for sunflowers in Missouri are strictly for birdseed use, but the same type of oilseed sunflowers are grown for birds as for the vegetable oil market. The main market for sunflowers in southeast Missouri is Buchheit Agri, which has a delivery point in Perryville. Buchheit's is currently offering 12 cents per pound on a floor contract and will offer a premium of a 50 percent price increase above 12 cents per pound for delivery on seed prior to September 15. This offer is subject to confirmation. Dave Danker, Division Manager of the Ag Division of Buchheit Agri, says, "we will do our best to encourage local sunflower production and for what we are unable to buy, we will handle the seed for the growers and assist them in marketing their crop."

Depending on planting and harvest dates, sunflower seeds can vary in moisture. According to Danker, "Buchheit seed will accept a 12 percent seed moisture or lower." For contract information, Danker encourages farmers to call Buchheit Agri at 800-622-7937.

Sunflowers are grown with conventional row crop equipment and have a wide planting window, from early April to late July in southeast Missouri. Although double cropping sunflowers after wheat can work well, an early planting can allow the harvest to be completed in early or mid-August, prior to other fall field work. Early planting also allows farmers to harvest prior to dove season for those interested in leasing land for hunting.

The Jefferson Institute, a non-profit education center that works on alternative crop development, has free information packets available on sunflower production, including production methods, herbicide options, and variety test results. For a packet or more information including an update on the latest herbicide registrations, call the Jefferson Institute at 573-449-3518. It pays to select the best performing varieties," says Myers. "Several major seed companies have a number of sunflower varieties available. The better varieties have yielded 2,000 pounds per acre or better."

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