

USDA Farm Service Agency County Drought Monitoring for 2005 (4/21/05)

Background: The USDA Farm Service Agency staffs offices in 26 county locations throughout the state. FSA employees interact with farmers and ranchers on a daily basis. During the 2005 drought situation, FSA county employees are sending a weekly report to FSA State Executive Director Jim Fitzgerald who also chairs the USDA State Emergency Board. Information is shared between FSA and partner USDA agencies Washington Agricultural Statistics Service and the Risk Management Agency for reports. Information from all three agencies is compiled into this biweekly report. The report is sent to USDA agencies, the Washington State Department of Agriculture and Congressional offices.

Northeast (Ferry, Pend Oreille, Stevens)

Rains occurred several times last week. Winter wheat and alfalfa crops look good. Early season grasses have started to grow, but it will be about a week before cattle are put out to pasture. Streams that feed irrigation systems and springs for livestock water may still be a problem but county offices have not received concerns from producers at this time.

East (Adams, Lincoln, Spokane, Whitman)

A few showers fell last week but drying winds followed. Reports were negative for rain in the west end of Adams County. Precipitation was closer to normal in Lincoln and Spokane counties with heavy rains in parts of Whitman County. The west end of Whitman County continued to experience dryer than normal conditions.

Summer fallow activity began in Adams County, indicating that producers believe evapotranspiration has begun to exceed potential moisture intake. Range conditions in Adams County remain poor in most areas although perennial grasses are beginning to grow.

Wheat and pasture conditions improved in Spokane, Lincoln and Whitman counties, although producers are concerned about pasture conditions in western Whitman County. Pasture losses are estimated at 50% in the west end of the county due to drought conditions. In Whitman County, spring cereal crops are beginning to emerge and producers are planting pulse crops.

Lincoln County has been approved for the Emergency Conservation Program and Adams County has requested approval to implement the program.

Southeast (Asotin, Columbia, Garfield, Walla Walla)

The Southeast portion of the state received much needed moisture last week that helped the crops. Winter wheat remained in good condition. Spring planting has occurred except in the upper elevations.

Concern still exists for rangeland pastures and irrigated fields. Rangeland pastures in many areas remained in poor condition as grass growth has been slow due to the drought and cool temperatures in April. Rains since mid-March have allowed irrigators who use the Walla Walla River to once again irrigate. They stopped in mid-March when the river was only 14% of normal, the minimum allowable amount to maintain fish. The ability to irrigate from the river is not expected to continue much longer after the weather warms.

Asotin and Garfield counties have been approved for the Emergency Conservation Program.

Columbia/Yakima Basin (Benton, Franklin, Grant, Kittitas, Klickitat, Yakima)

Most of the counties received spotty rain, much less than normal for this time of year. Only Grant County reported rains that improved crops and pasture. Grant, Benton and Yakima counties reported receiving frost with possible damage to fruit crops. Damage was significant in Yakima County. Benton and Klickitat counties reported strong winds that have contributed to the dry conditions. Klickitat County has had 57% less precipitation than normal for the water year and 22% less than 2001, a year with an 87% average loss of forage crops due to the drought.

The Roza Irrigation District was still without water last week and is expected to be without water for at least two more weeks. The Kittitas Reclamation District allowed producers 34% of their normal water allotment.

Wheat producers in Benton and Franklin counties have reported stressed conditions of the winter wheat. Range conditions are still suffering, although Grant County reported some improvement.

Benton and Klickitat counties have been approved for the Emergency Conservation Program. Yakima and Kittitas have requested approval to implement the program.

North Central (Chelan, Douglas, Okanogan)

Light precipitation occurred in North Central Washington and was accompanied by wind in Chelan and Douglas counties. There have been a few reports of frost damage to orchards in Okanogan County. Frost continues to be a threat with low night time temperatures.

The winter wheat looked good given the lack of moisture. Most producers have not planted spring cereal crops. In the Okanogan area, most irrigation districts were operating and providing water. Public meeting for irrigators in Chelan and Douglas were being organized. Early season grasses were starting to grow in Okanogan County.

Livestock producers in Douglas County have contacted the county office requesting information about water for livestock under the Emergency Conservation Program. Chelan and Douglas counties have been approved for the program.

Northwest (Island, San Juan, Skagit, Snohomish, Whatcom)

The northwest counties received heavy rains last week with reports of pools of standing water in the fields in Whatcom County. The excessive moisture has kept producers from working in the fields in all counties.

Olympic Peninsula/So. Puget Sound (Clallam, Grays Harbor, Jefferson, King, Kitsap, Lewis, Mason, Pacific, Pierce, Thurston)

With the exception of the rain shadow around Port Angeles and Sequim, the rest of the region received above normal precipitation. The snowpack in the mountains has improved also but is still well below drought levels. The cool, wet weather has kept producers out of the fields.

Lower Columbia (Clark, Cowlitz, Skamania, Wahkiakum)

Cool, wet weather continued last week. It is unknown at this time if the cooler, wet weather will cause any crop damage after the unseasonably warm, dry winter.