

USDA Farm Service Agency County Drought Monitoring for 2005 (05/19/05)

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 in the past 2 weeks have helped crops and pasture, although Stevens County reported receiving little rain last week. Temperatures have been normal for this time of year. Spring grain plantings are just about complete. Winter wheat looks good. Pasture and hay crops continue to grow well. Some cattlemen reported that water sources are low or not running. Ferry County requested approval to implement the Emergency Conservation Program.

East (Adams, Lincoln, Spokane, Whitman)

Heavy rains improved crops in these four counties, although the southern portion of Adams County did not receive much rain. The heavy rains caused some erosion and flash flooding in Lincoln, Spokane and Whitman counties. Hail damage was reported in the area north of Othello from a May 8 storm.

Producers reported a wet first cutting of hay for the second year in a row. Winter wheat, spring crops and pastures improved in all counties. Some rust is beginning to show up in the wheat in Whitman County.

Rains have not had much impact on the subsurface hydrology in Adams County so FSA staff do not anticipate a decrease in demand for Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) requests for water project funding. The Adams County Committee will be reassessing the use of Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) emergency grazing. The moisture criteria may not be met due to the recent rains.

Southeast (Asotin, Columbia, Garfield, Walla Walla)

Rain showers continued throughout SE Washington. Range and cropland conditions improved. No reports of damage from the storms were received.

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

Major rain storms brought greater than normal precipitation the Columbia and Yakima basins. The rain did not change the situation for irrigators with junior water rights. The

Roza Irrigation District and the Wapato Irrigation Project continued to ration water to their farmers.

The heavy storms resulted in some mildew damage in apples and grapes. Benton and Franklin counties reported rust in the wheat crop and some damage to first cutting hay crops. Weevils have been a problem in hay in Klickitat County and producers have not been able to cut the hay and get rid of them because of the rain. Several producers in Yakima County reported hail damage to fruit and vegetable crops. Funnel clouds and a tornado in the Moxee area tore out some trees. Kittitas County crops and pastures primarily benefited from the rains.

Ponds in Klickitat County are not filling and the county office reports drought conditions prevail despite the rains.

North Central (Chelan, Douglas, Okanogan)

North Central Washington received rains which helped the cropland conditions. Pastures in Chelan and Douglas counties are still in poor condition but did green up. Livestock water is in short supply. Total ECP funds have been allocated and additional funds requested. Most of the funds have been for livestock watering with one request for an irrigation well. Okanogan County requested approval to implement the Emergency Conservation Program.

At a drought workshop in Cashmere, irrigation districts did not express concern about running out of water for the crop year. The FSA County Director in Chelan County has been contacted by 2 producers who irrigate out of wells and are concerned about the water level dropping. They believe they will need an alternative supply.

Fruit crops look good in Okanogan County with no reports of damage at this time.

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

County offices in the Northwest part of the state reported slightly lower than normal rainfall the past two weeks and slightly higher temperatures. Farmers have been able to get in the fields to do fieldwork.

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

The Northeast portion of the Olympic Peninsula has received less moisture than normal and is dry. Grays Harbor, Pacific and Lewis counties received excessive moisture and producers have had difficulty getting in the field. May 31 is the final planting date for small grains so the planting window is coming to a close. The other counties have had a mixture of rain and sun with producers able to work in the fields.

Lower Columbia (Clark, Cowlitz, Skamania, Wahkiakum)

The Southwest part of the state continued to receive major rainfall. Berry growers have reported that the rains have been favorable. Strawberry harvest is expected to begin soon. Corn has not been planted since it has been too wet to get in the fields.