

DROUGHT

From Page 1

over most of the state. Most problems have worsened recently with a lack of precipitation over the last 30 to 60 days," said Dennis Todey, SDSU Extension state climatologist.

He noted that the 30-day total precipitation and percent of average precipitation from average show that most of the state has received less than 50 percent of average precipitation during that time period.

Several weather stations in the southeast part of the state were the driest or top 10 driest during the month of June based on over 100 years of records.

"A major driver of this drought has been temperatures, which have been running consistently warm since the spring and winter," Todey said. "Increased temperatures have increased plant water use and exhausted limited soil moisture reserves. The last 30 days has continued this trend being 4 to 8 degrees above average across the state."

Most of the state has set records for overall temperatures since March and since the beginning of the calendar year.

At first glance, while taking a drive through the country in Clay County, crops appear to be faring well.

"Fields still look very good; they still look green," Myron said. "But anything on sand, or on hillier areas - I'm hearing that crops there are already yellowing. An other issue will be how hot will it be when the plant actually goes through pollination. We could end up with a bunch of nubs on plants with no kernels.

"That's the fear here, and it looks like fear is turning to reality," he said. "We have maybe a 30 percent chance of rain forecast this week, but when it's this dry, it just seems like you can't generate any rain."

Larry Wagner, an agronomy crops fields specialist from the Sioux Falls regional Extension office, said if the current hot and dry weather trends continue, nearly all of the South Dakota's corn crop will be affected.

"It's kind of spotty ... I know up in the Flandreau area, there is a small section of South Dakota that is about an inch ahead of normal (in precipitation), and the crops around there look quite good."

Wagner spent time Tuesday taking photos of crops in Lincoln County. "Even in the marginal areas that aren't quite as bad, you're starting to see a real difference in the water holding capacity of different soils."

Conditions appear to become dryer the farther south one travels in the state, he said.

"Down in Bon Homme County, and in those areas, for the most part, farmers are starting to actively look at and some have even actively begun to harvest corn for silage," Wagner said. "When you see that, you know it's gotten to a point where they don't see getting enough grain from the crop to make any difference, and they are going to salvage it for their cattle."

In some of the cornfields Wagner visited near Canton Tuesday, the corn has tassled, but there are no ears.

As of July 15, he said, the USDA's National Agricultural Statistic Service (NASS) surprisingly indicated that throughout the entire state, about 33 percent of the corn crop was described as being in good condition.

"There are some areas from Sioux Falls on north that are good," Wagner said. "There are a few places, depending on the soil and the field management, no till, all those sorts of things put together with a couple

SDSU

From Page 1

Each specialist will discuss specific issues dealing with their area of expertise and provide practical management strategies and resources agriculture producers can rely on during this drought.

The updates will be held at 7 p.m. CST and 6 p.m. MST at all eight of the SDSU Extension

Regional Centers; Aberdeen, 605.626.2870, Lemmon, 605.374.4177, Mitchell, 605.995.7378, Pierre, 605.773.8120, Rapid City, 605.394.1722, Sioux Falls, 605.782.3290, Watertown, 605.882.5140 and Winner, 605.842.1267. For location address visit iGrow.org. SDSU field specialists in the areas of crops and livestock will be available onsite to visit with attendees and answer questions. Other field specialists will address family issues, including

budgeting and stress. "This is a difficult time for all aspects of South Dakota's agriculture industry. We know each agriculture producer and family is impacted by the drought in a uniquely different way," Nold said. "This seminar is only a starting point, but it is our way of providing support and answering as many questions as possible in one place and at one time."

timely rains, that are probably in excellent condition, but that's not much of the territory."

According to the NASS, in fact, only 4 percent of the state's corn crop could be described as in excellent condition as of July 15. Thirty six percent of the crop was deemed to be in fair condition. One-fifth of the state's crop is described as in poor condition, with 7 percent in very poor condition.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Climate Prediction Center's 8- to 14-day outlooks continue the recent trend of likely warmer and drier conditions. Current data show a strong likelihood for warmer than average conditions to continue throughout the balance of July. Similarly precipitation is more likely to be below average through the month.

The combination leads to continued and likely some worsening of drought conditions not only in South Dakota, but across much of the middle part of the country.

The NASS statistics prove to be a grim indicator of the toll that hot, dry weather is having on the state's corn crop. Wagner said that on July 1, 68 percent of the state's crop was rated good to excellent. By July 8, 60

percent of the crop received that rating.

"And then in one week - this week - it dropped from 60 percent good to excellent down to that 35 percent," he said. "If it doesn't rain, that trend is probably going to level off a little bit."

"We're clicking onto four weeks now without any measureable precipitation," Myron said. "A few of the fringe areas around us have gotten a little bit, but right here in Vermillion, we've missed all of the rain. A lot of the farmers are comparing this to the summer of '88."

Farmers also must keep an eye out for aflatoxin, a disease that may develop in stressed corn plants.

"Basically, it's dangerous to dairy cattle, young animals, poultry, things like that," Myron said, "which are a lot of the markets that our ethanol plants sell their byproducts to. I have my fingers crossed that we aren't going to be dealing with that, but these are the exact type of conditions that bring that about."

Insurance will likely provide some financial relief to local farmers should their crops wither in the prolonged drought. But people who depend on those farmers' crops for their livelihood - ranging from ethanol plants and livestock

producers, to people like Myron - will be more directly affected.

"The people in the second tier - people like us and the people who sell the chemicals and the fertilizer and the machinery and all of those types of things - there's nothing to protect them," Myron said, "and all of a sudden we're facing two short crop years."

"Usually, these things cycle. One year you'll have a short crop, and the next year, you'll have a normal crop, and the year after that, you may have an above-average crop," he said. "It looks like we're looking at two years in a row of a short crop, and that's a bit tough."

Adding to the disappointment is the strong sense of hope most area farmers enjoyed after spring ushered in perfect conditions for quick field preparation and planting.

"We got off to an awesome start," Myron said. "Because of the planting problems last year, everybody was ready to jump in and get into the fields. We got a couple rains after that, and everything was looking just great."

"And as far as the mood in the farming community," he said, "everybody sort of let out a big sigh of relief ... but then, the rain quit falling."

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