

Harvest shaping up strong

Heat still needed to boost yields, officials say

By Randy Dockendorf

Randy.dockendorf@plaintalk.net

The region's fall harvest remains on target for record yields, but the coming weeks will prove critical in terms of needed heat, according to a climate expert.

The outlook was provided during last week's national conference call with Jeff Andresen, the Michigan state climatologist affiliated with Michigan State University.

South Dakota and Nebraska have enjoyed nearly ideal weather, Andresen said.

"Most crops are in very good, if not excellent, condition," he said. "More than 70 percent of the corn crop is in good or excellent condition. Very little of the overall crop is in poor or very poor shape."

The optimistic outlook is reflected in both U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and private surveys, Andresen said.

"Most of those (surveys) are suggesting very high yield potential," he said. "Certainly, for corn and soybean yields, new records are forecast across the board and an all-time record production for all crops as well."

It's actually been a tale of two seasons, which has worked out well, he explained. The Central Plains has gone through an unusual year of cooler-than-normal temperatures and wetter-than-normal precipitation.

"We had one of the coolest winters on record, at least in 100 years," he said. "The upper air has

played a major role in temperatures the last several months. Much of the region was colder than normal, not only for the growing season but all the way back to the preceding winter."

The Corn Belt's big chill continued into the summer, where July - normally the warmest month of the year - reported mean temperatures 4 degrees below normal. The figure ranks as one of the largest departures from normal, and a record in some states, dating back to 1895.

The cool summer has created concerns over degree-days, a measure tied to the heat received during the growing season, Andresen said.

"The degree-day totals are behind where they typically are this time of the year," he said.

"Now, we are in the second warmest month of the year. If you don't catch up with degree days, it's difficult to do so before the first killing frost in the fall. If you have deficits this time of the year, you usually end up with deficits. The same goes for surpluses."

While the region experienced warmer temperatures last week, with the heat index reaching 100 to 105 degrees, the change appears temporary, Andresen said.

"The outlook suggests a return of an upper air trough over the next one to two weeks with the potential of cooler-than-normal temperatures and above-normal precipitation totals," he said.

A Record Year?

Many farmers are comparing the current scenario to another historic year, Andresen said.

"One of the most commonly used models is 1992, which was a year without a summer. It was one of the coolest summers on record," he said. "But it's not quite as bad in many cases as it was during 1992."

When it comes to heat units, corn carries a greater concern than other crops, Andresen said.

"Primarily, an issue will be quality," he said. "It's going to cost more than normal to dry the crops this year, and some test weights may be low. When the grower goes to sell the grain, it will be reflected on the price as a lot lower than what they would typically get."

In terms of heat units, soybeans provide less of an issue, Andresen said.

"The soybeans are ahead of the last four years," he said. "There is some concern about soybeans (receiving enough heat), but soybeans being behind (normal) isn't as critical an issue. They are sensitive to shortening day lengths, and they 'hurry up' and hasten to maturity at the end of the year. They are good at it."

As for precipitation, the region sits in outstanding shape, Andresen said.

Both South Dakota and Nebraska are pulling out of historic drought conditions. Southeast South Dakota still reports abnormally dry conditions, while northeast Nebraska doesn't report any drought conditions.

This year has produced

historic rainfall totals in some areas, bolstering the precipitation picture, Andresen said.

"Much of the growing season was wetter than normal, especially early on," the climatologist said. "The central and northern Corn Belt regions have received more than 20 inches of total precipitation, which is a large positive departure. Some parts of the region are more than 10 inches ahead of normal."

The rainfall reserve proved critical during July and early August, which saw warmer and drier conditions, he said.

"There was a lot of water stored in the soil," he said. "Parts of the region carried a very positive surplus of precipitation for the growing season."

The Home Stretch Andresen admitted the outlook stands less than rosy in some circumstances.

Areas that experienced late planting could find problems with accumulating heat units, and the situation could worsen with a shortened growing season this fall.

Other areas were devastated by hail, tornados and other storms. In some instances, it became too late for replanting or for turning to an alternative crop.

But those who have made it this far into the growing season should stand in good shape, Andresen said.

"We have moved through sensitive reproduction stages such as silking and pollination for corn and pod fill for soybeans," he said. "We have gone through these stages with ample moisture, which is why there is such a large potential for many areas of the Midwest and why

projections are so high."

History also stands on the farmers' side, at least when looking at the past half-century, he explained.

"We tend to see that cooler-than-normal and wetter-than-normal weather in the Corn Belt produces higher-than-normal yields," he said. "The statistics collectively since 1991 show, when it was cooler and wetter than normal, yields have been more than 10 bushels per acre higher than the average."

However, Andresen warned that dangers still lurk even at harvest time.

"There is the potential for (record) yields, but we don't know what lies ahead," he said. "If there's an early killing freeze this fall, it could considerably change things."

Even record yields can carry drawbacks, he said.

"We are looking at high moisture and low test weight at the elevator," he said. "It's made even worse by low prices, which is another area of concern."

As far as the long-term outlook, Andresen noted a moderate probability of a weak to moderate El Nino this fall and early winter. The three-month outlook for September through November calls for cooler-than-normal and wetter-than-normal weather for the Central Plains.

It all adds up to the prospects for a banner year, Andresen said.

"We have good to excellent conditions across the region," he said.

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TRIP

From Page 1A

sister city in Germany, and the final week saw the group traverse across the roads and vast hills of Deutschland.

For Dibley, it was important that her students not only learn about Germany, but also get rewarded for it intrinsically and academically.

"It is not necessary that if you are a part of the GAPP program you do this for credit, but that was important to me," Dibley told the Vermillion City Council Tuesday as she and the students shared their experiences. "They will get half a credit from Vermillion High School which is basically one semester of High School German. By far if you wonder if they've learned enough just ask them. The intensity of experience, the language, the culture was absolutely worth it."

Freidel shared the memory of the trip near and through Berlin and the discussion about Cold War Germany.

"We spoke about Berlin and how it functioned after the Soviets and the American sector," she said. "It was very cool to see history come to life rather than just reading about it in textbooks."

Dibley let the students explain to the council what else they learned across the pond.

Westergaard, an admitted history buff, would like to go back to Germany for a semester.

"I think we all matured a lot while we were over there," he said. "The stress of (not speaking with English-speaking students) and being dropped off somewhere to ask 'where am I?' Let's try speaking German."

Westergaard also expanded on his love of German food.

"Food is always important," Dibley quipped.

Politics were a main theme for the students on their travels and one particular hot American topic got the students and their teacher into a bit of warm water.

"The topic of gun control came up and we

were not very popular for a few minutes," Dibley said. "They cannot believe that we actually have guns in our homes."

"I got the evil eye," Westergaard added. Dibley said she did as well.

"They didn't expect civilized people like us to possibly ever own guns," Dibley said. "That's something I won't ever forget."

Westergaard shared a brief story.

"They were like, 'What? You got a shotgun for Christmas?'" he said. "They were shocked."

"They thought we were barbaric," Dibley said. Westergaard added that some of his German acquaintances explained an extensive process to acquire the simplest of hunting rifles.

"I was like what? No thank you," he said.

They also spoke of some of their discussion with Germans and the horrible memory of World War II, specifically, the Nazi concentration camps.

"Couple of my friends there were ashamed, but they embraced the history," Westergaard said. "They know it's bad and a Nazi joke there is just as bad as some here. They want to learn from it and don't try to just ignore it."

"It's kind of like how we talk about slavery," Hackemer said. "It's really awful, but it happened."

A quick perusal of the group's photographs showed a vast array of travels to different types of agriculture and sights some would only see in a book or Google.

"The windows are all full-length body windows that are tilted out," Fuller said of one of the towers

they visited. "So you can lean yourself over so you can feel like you are above the ground."

Freidel shared a quick thought with the council and other guests in attendance.

"I refused," she said of taking a closer look at the tilted windows.

They visited the state legislature in Germany and spoke of how the five different political factions are divided.

That was one thing that slowly drew the students' attention to the thinking of the younger Germans.

"The younger generation is more politically-minded in Europe," Dibley said. "Especially about American politics. That was very interesting."

Rosdail shared the experience of visiting Cologne and its vast architecture while they also shared a tale of visiting a German costume shop.

"We also learned what we could handle," Rosdail said.

Fuller said that the Vermillion students were sad to leave their host families after "getting to know them for two weeks."

"It was a sad morning and all the families came to see us off," Fuller said. "They pretty much went everywhere we went except when we went to the bathroom."

Ultimately they joined forces with a group of students from Sioux Falls O'Gorman High School and that would aid in saving money on travel as they commuted the last week with a larger group, Dibley said.

One of the trips to Potsdam - the sister city of Sioux Falls - evoked an

interesting tale.

"While we were there (with the O'Gorman kids) the mayor of Sioux Falls was actually in Potsdam christening a new tram that they named Sioux Falls for their city subways," Freidel said. "So the kids from Sioux Falls met their mayor for the first time in Potsdam, Germany."

Some of their other experiences involved

teaching their mother language to a German class taking an English-speaking course, being presented with a cake made in the shape of an American flag, and getting ribbed by local kids about the National Security Agency's dealings with its own.

They also got to take trips to lakes and...fall into German waters.

"We decided to go

kayaking and none of us were prepared for it," Fuller said. "And I flipped my kayak over and lost my glasses."

"We experienced the German optometrist and we got a new pair of glasses out of it," Dibley added.

Dibley said that she hopes to host the German students next spring.

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