

2006 Agricultural Summary

January began with unseasonably warm and windy conditions. Harvest was virtually completed across the Plains and North Texas during this period. Irrigation was in full force as most areas of the state experienced extreme drought conditions. These unfavorable, dry conditions eventually led to an uprise of wildfires, as persistent winds aided in the progression of these fires. Fire crews from surrounding states were stationed throughout many portions of the state to confront the dangers of this issue. Herd reduction and liquidation were common due to high feed prices, lack of winter forage, and slim prospects of adequate rainfall in the near future. Land preparations were active for various crops, however, many producers indicated that an increase in moisture was desperately needed before those activities could be completed. Towards the end of the month, isolated showers crossed southern and eastern portions of the state and slightly improved conditions. Cotton ginnings were ongoing as most areas anticipated it to last around another month.

February started much the same way as January, with above normal temperatures and dry conditions. Midway through the month, a cold front passed through the state and contributed to the development of much needed rainfall. However, the resulting rainfall was minimal as the vast majority of the state only received around a half inch or less. Around the end of the month, many locations received moisture in the form of misty rains and fog. The additional moisture was beneficial to some areas, but it did little to ease drought conditions overall. There was some limited green-up in wheat fields, but much of the crop remained in bad shape. Only a handful of cotton gins were still operating as they worked to complete ginning of the previous year's record crop. Vegetable harvest continued, but there were some reports of frost damage on spinach. Wildfires continued to be a serious threat throughout the state as new fires continued to emerge. Herds were highly supplemented and hay became more scarce and higher priced. Many producers also continued to reduce the size of their herds in response to this growing shortage of available hay and stock water.

The beginning of **March** was signaled by a drastic change in scenery as high temperatures skyrocketed into the upper 80's and 90's nearly statewide. Wichita Falls had the distinction of being the state's hotspot with the thermometer topping out at 98 degrees. The record breaking heat was a result of very low humidity. Many of areas that were fortunate enough to receive the increased rainfall at the end of February were now beginning to see improvements in grasses. Supplemental feeding was still necessary in all areas but decreased in locations that experienced this pasture improvement. Planting of corn began in the Blacklands along with several other areas in the southern region of the state. Producers began watering grapes for the first time in the season. By the middle of the month, a massive wildfire broke out in the Panhandle. Numerous structures were destroyed and many towns were evacuated as over 600,000 acres were burned. This disaster, which began just east of Amarillo, was possibly one of the worst fires in Texas history. As further assessment was conducted after fires were put out, it was estimated that 840,000 acres were scorched; killing approximately 10,000 cattle and horses. Wheat in the Blacklands began showing some promise after a few weeks of showers, and heading began in the San Antonio-Winter Garden area. Peaches and pecans began to bud out in some areas of the state. Towards the end of the month, a cold front passed through the state and contributed to another increase in rainfall. There were also some minute amounts of early spring snowfall associated with this cold front. The increased moisture was extremely beneficial to areas recovering from the devastating wildfires. Also, pasture green-up progressed and stock water levels increased in many areas. Despite the positives associated with this cold front, freezing temperatures caused many concerns of freeze damage to early emerging crops. Also, summer crop planting was delayed as producers waited for fields to dry.

April began with scattered showers moving through many areas of the state. These showers provided relief to cotton producers in the Rio Grande Valley and Coastal Bend as this was the first rain since pre-planting for many in these areas. Springtime temperatures were in effect as high in the 80's were common in all areas with some reports of 90's in southern locations. Pasture green-up progressed northward as temperatures rose. However, freeze damage from the ending of March was noticed in some wheat fields that headed out and also in newly emerged corn and sorghum. Grapes were included in this list as many vineyards in the Trans-Pecos area and the Edwards Plateau were severely damaged. In the Plains, warmer temperatures and winds as high as 35-50 mph sapped soil moisture that had improved from recent rains. Later in the month, more inclement weather replaced the heat across areas of the Blacklands, Edwards Plateau, Upper Coast, and Central and Eastern Texas. In the hardest hit locations, dangerous straight-line winds and baseball sized hail caused extensive structure and crop damage. Many areas experienced much cooler temperatures, which in return decreased the evaporation rate of soil moisture. Small grain producers began cutting wheat for hay in many regions as there were some reports of rust in some eastern areas of the state. Although planting of corn was in full swing in the Panhandle, some other fields around the state were at a total loss due to the effects of the weather. In many cases, cattle were grazing on undesirable weeds such as huisache due to lack of adequate forage. Spring calving and lambing began to wrap up.

May started with continued rains to most areas of the state. The cotton crop in the Rio Grande Valley was a loss due to the severe drought over the last few months. Pecan growers in the Blacklands and Edwards Plateau began spraying for pecan nut case bearer. A little later, thermometer readings dropped into the 30's in the northern Panhandle as a late-spring cold front swept through that area. There were numerous reports of high winds, large hail, and tornadoes. Small grain fields and summer crops were damaged in many areas. Although the increased moisture from the storms was very beneficial to many pastures around the state, horn fly populations began to increase in cattle herds. Around the end of the month, torrential downpours pounded southeast Texas and coastal areas. Rain accumulations of six inches were common in eastern counties of the Upper Coast. One location in the region was swamped with as much as 16 inches of rainfall. As weather permitted, some producers in eastern areas began their second hay cutting while South Texas growers were only cutting their first hay crop on irrigated land. Planting of cotton continued at a rapid pace in the Panhandle and Southern Plains. Many drought stricken fields in the Rio Grande Valley and Coastal Bend were disastered out. Corn in North Central Texas began tasseling, and fields in southern regions began setting ears. Despite these positives, corn in the Blacklands began to show drought stress. Concerns with potential Mexican rice borer problems arose in some areas. Also, pecan nut case bearer problems were reported in some locations. Pasture conditions were generally holding steady, and cattle were in fairly decent shape.

The beginning of **June** started off much the same way as May ended. Rains averaged from mostly 3 to 10 inches around the state. There were reports of hail damage in some areas. The resulting rain provided much needed relief from extreme heat across the state. However, the additional moisture came too late for most corn and dryland cotton fields in the Rio Grande Valley. This proved to be the same along the Upper Coast and Coastal Bend as corn was too far along to benefit from the increased moisture. Grain harvest of a much reduced wheat crop began in the Panhandle. Baling and grazing of wheat was ongoing in various locations around the state. The heat was brutal across most areas of the state as temperatures rocketed to the triple-digits a little later in the month. Some locations even saw the thermometer crack the 110 degree mark. Corn producers in drought stricken areas across the Blacklands and southern regions began cutting for silage and hay as the grain yield potential dropped below acceptable levels. Thrip infestations were a problem in cotton fields. Towards the end of the month, rainfall dropped to more modest levels. High winds and hail accompanied precipitation in the Pan

handle, which damaged some newly emerged crops. Small grain harvest neared completion in the High Plains, where yields were poor even in some irrigated fields. Corn silage yields decreased along with prospects for good grain yields. Sorghum yields improved in the Blacklands due to recent rains. Peanuts began pegging in the Southern High Plains, but there were some reports of pod rot due to excessive moisture applied to pivots. Pecan nut development began in the Trans-Pecos as there was some damage from the recent hail storms. Pastures were generally very dry and further deteriorating in spite of the rains. Unfortunately, there were once again some reports of rangeland fires in the High Plains. Hay continued to be in short supply, and supplemental feeding continued across most areas of the state.

As **July** commenced, most areas of the state received light to moderate rainfall. Growers in the High Plains continued to heavily irrigate land, as the recent rains weren't enough to makeup for the persistent hot and dry conditions. Also, replanting of dryland cotton acreage began across many areas of the Plains. Some counties completely zeroed out their fields due to unfavorable conditions. In response to this misfortune, some growers in the Southern High Plains planted sorghum as an alternative crop. Corn harvest for silage neared completion in the Blacklands. Later in the month, rain accumulations decreased as temperatures gradually increased back into the hundreds. Harvest of corn began in the Northern High Plains, where there were some growing concerns about high aflatoxin. Peanuts were pegging at an intense rate in heavily irrigated areas of the Southern High Plains. Soybean harvest neared completion in the Blacklands, with very low yields reported. Pecans were at the expansion stage in the Trans-Pecos area. Due to the very hot and dry conditions, pastures were reported to be "January brown" in areas of the Plains. Around month's end, heavy rains of mostly 4 to 6 inches fell along the Upper Coast and Louisiana border. One county in the Upper Coast reported as much as 10 to 12 inches of rainfall. However, most areas of the state remained relatively dry. The heavy rains along the Upper Coast contributed to lint losses in cotton.

August began with most areas of the state failing to receive a trace of precipitation. In fact, areas such as the Lower Valley reported that this month was one of the hottest on record, according to local meteorologists. Long-term hot and dry conditions in the High Plains forced some growers to abandon corn fields, along with an increase of cotton abandonment. Harvest of wine grapes was completed in the Trans-Pecos area, where production was dramatically down from normal levels. There were widespread reports of decreases in feed supplies and available pasture for livestock, along with stock tanks and creeks going dry. Some locations had little or no hay locally, which caused producers to shop outside the state. The majority of the soybean crop in the Blacklands was baled for hay. Also, some soybean acreage along the Upper Coast was destroyed by recent, excessive rains that rotted the seeds in the pods. Army worms and grasshoppers in East Texas further reduced forage. Pecans were in the water to nut-filling stage in the Trans-Pecos area. In the Northern High Plains, additional rainfall around the end of the month contributed to a reduction in cotton boll shedding. It also helped an otherwise fair sorghum crop in this area progress from a pre-boot to soft-dough stage. Livestock producers in the Plains and Trans-Pecos area also reaped the benefits of the recent moisture as they experienced an increase in grass green up.

The beginning of **September** was signaled by a small increase in moisture as most areas received light rainfall. These rains were especially beneficial to the Southern High Plains as sub-soil moisture was stored. However, the resulting cooler temperatures in the High Plains contributed to an increase in earworm and armyworm pressure. Also, there were some reports of blight and web blotch in the peanut crop. Planting of oats began in the Cross Timbers and Blacklands. Many growers along the Upper Coast began spraying soybean fields due to problems of Asian Soybean Rust, stinkbugs, and snails. Forage growth increased in the Northern

Low Plains, causing many ranches that intended to start early culling and shipping yearlings to hold off a little while longer. Towards the middle of the month, cotton leaf disease increased in the Southern High Plains. Around the end of the month, pecans began splitting in the Trans-Pecos area. Haying was in full swing in the Northern High Plains, and producers in South East Texas were getting their last cuttings for the year. Cattle sales decreased somewhat in the Blacklands due to improved grazing conditions.

October started as most areas in Central and Eastern Texas were dry once again. In the Northern High Plains, producers followed up corn harvest with wheat planting. Producers along the Coastal Bend harvested soybeans while spraying for soybean rust was ongoing along the Upper Coast. In the Trans-Pecos area, pecan nut filling was completed as planting of fall onions began. However, concerns began to arise as many producers experienced a dramatic increase in aphids. There was change in scenery later in the month as virtually all areas of the state received at least a quarter-inch of rainfall. Although the increase in moisture was beneficial to small grains, harvest was delayed in the High Plains and along the Upper Coast as fields were too wet for activities. Hail storms were detrimental to the Western Trans-Pecos area as several thousand acres of cotton and pecans were severely damaged. Rainfall continued to increase as the month progressed. Some areas northeast of Houston received over 18 inches in one week, which caused flooding and forced livestock producers to move cattle to higher ground. Towards the end of the month, a light freeze crossed sections of the High Plains. High winds were prevalent with gusts up to 60 mph in isolated localities. Although these winds slowed activities for a few days, cotton harvest was in full swing in the Plains. Producers in the San-Antonio Winter Garden prepared fields, planted fall vegetables, and harvested cabbage, cucumbers, and green beans. Supplemental feeding decreased in some areas of the state as pastures improved due to recent rainfall.

November began as most areas of the state experienced light to moderate rainfall. In the Southern High Plains, previous high winds helped drain moisture from the soil which allowed for the progression of cotton harvest. Overall, sub-soil moisture was mostly short to adequate. Producers in the Northern High Plains planted small grains behind harvested cotton, with the anticipation of wheat prices continuing to rise into the spring. In South Central Texas, the pecan crop was almost a total loss due to recent dry conditions along with squirrel problems. Many producers in the Blacklands hauled water to livestock as water supplies continued to decline. Supplemental feeding of livestock also continued as hay remained in short supply.

December commenced as many producers experienced very low temperatures and snow for the first time of the growing season. For the most part, the cold front had a negative effect on agricultural activities but did actually improve insect problems. The combination of dry and cold weather forced many producers to consider culling and reducing livestock as herds continued to decline in body condition. In South Texas, range and pasture conditions continued to decline as forage quality suffered from heavy frost and dry soil conditions.