

Issue NE-CW1304, released March 29, 2004, by the Nebraska Agricultural Statistics Service, USDA. For more information contact us at: 100 Centennial Mall North, Suite 298, Lincoln, NE 68508, 402-437-5541, e-mail at nass-ne@nass.usda.gov, Internet at <http://www.usda.gov/nass/>.

Agricultural Summary: For the month of March 2004, above normal temperatures have prompted an early "green up" of wheat and pastures, according to the USDA's Nebraska Agricultural Statistics Service. End of March soil temperatures are about 10 degrees above those of last year and normal. These above normal soil temperatures are due in part to three weeks of above normal air temperatures, with some record highs being set. Soil moisture conditions improved in the east while soil moisture remains a concern for western producers where conditions continued to be rated in extreme drought. Producer activities included livestock care, marketing grain, and spring planting preparations.

This release is based on reports and data from FSA county directors, county extension educators, NOAA, and the High Plains Climate Center. Current county specific comments plus current and historic PDF files of Weather and Crop reports can be found at: http://www.nass.usda.gov/ne/cropwthr/cmts_cur.htm

Weather Summary: During March average weekly temperatures increased all month and ranged from a high of 5 degrees above normals the first week to a high of 15 degrees above normals the last week. Precipitation for the month came in the form of snow and rain with largest amounts received in the southeast.

Field Crops Report: **Wheat** condition rated 10 percent very poor, 18 poor, 37 fair, 34 good, and 1 excellent, a slight improvement over last year's condition of 31 percent good or excellent. **Hay and forage** supplies were mostly adequate statewide.

Livestock, Pasture and Range Report: **Cattle and calves** condition rated 1 percent poor, 11 fair, 69 good, and 19 excellent. Calving progressed to 66 percent complete with calf losses rated mostly average. Stalk fields continued to provide grazing potential, with some supplemental feeding.

The following are comments from Nebraska's FSA County Executive Directors and county Extension Educators:

NORTHWEST

SCOTTS BLUFF/MORRILL: Spring tillage operations have begun for sugar beets.

NORTH CENTRAL

HOLT/BOYD: Dry soil moisture conditions are still the biggest problem to be faced. Pasture growth will be poor regardless of moisture received between now and turn out. Wheat looks ok now but will soon be in need of moisture as it begins spring growth.

NORTHEAST

ANTELOPE: Most producers have sufficient hay and should have some carry over by the time cattle go to pasture. Producers are selling grain and doing some field work last week. Disking and applying dry fertilizer. Calving progress is good to excellent. Temperatures have been above normal for this time of year.

CEDAR: Had 15 to 20 inches of snow on 3/15 - no blowing all went into the soil, resulting in good top soil conditions. Snow caused a little problem for the cow/calf producers for a week.

DIXON: Rain over the last week has added to the moisture levels for spring. Pastures are rapidly turning green here in the Northeast. We are seeing a fair amount of grain movement and producers are preparing equipment for field conditioning and planting.

THURSTON: A mid March snow storm dropped 6-15 inches of snow in Thurston County. It melted quickly and was absorbed into the ground. Warm temps at the end of March have started growth of cool season grasses. Some spring tillage and fertilization have begun. Some oats have been planted.

CENTRAL

DAWSON: Concerns for adequate water still tops the list followed by fertilizer costs. Some stalk cutting and disking have been observed. The pastures are going to need moisture this spring to recover from past season(s) drought.

EAST CENTRAL

CASS: A lot of questions about reseeding, overgrazed pastures.

DODGE: Farmers are hauling corn and soybeans to the warehouse, a few have applied anhydrous, and most are making preparations for planting. Moisture conditions are better than a year ago at this time.

SARPY/DOUGLAS: Good topsoil moisture but still limited subsoil moisture. Pastures beginning to green up.

SAUNDERS: Farmers are getting into the fields. CRP grasses are being planted and fertilizer is being put on.

WASHINGTON: Some field work is starting with the unseasonably warm weather.

SOUTHWEST

CHASE: It is still very dry in the area and the wheat is not in very good shape.

FRONTIER: A few of the farmers are reporting wheat losses and will possibly tear up the crop to replant to another. Ranchers are wrapping up their calving season. High cattle prices and high crop prices are helping them stay optimistic.

HAYES/HITCHCOCK: Wheat is greening up with many bare spots in the fields. Above normal temperatures are a concern. Calving is progressing and going well.

SOUTH CENTRAL

WEBSTER: Army worms are running rampant in alfalfa and wheat. Extensive spraying is being applied. Calving has gone well and there are still good hay/forage bales available. There is a little water in some ponds due to the precipitation in some areas of the county.

SOUTHEAST

GAGE: Fence repair, fertilizing, and spraying wheat. Army cutworm activity in wheat and alfalfa.

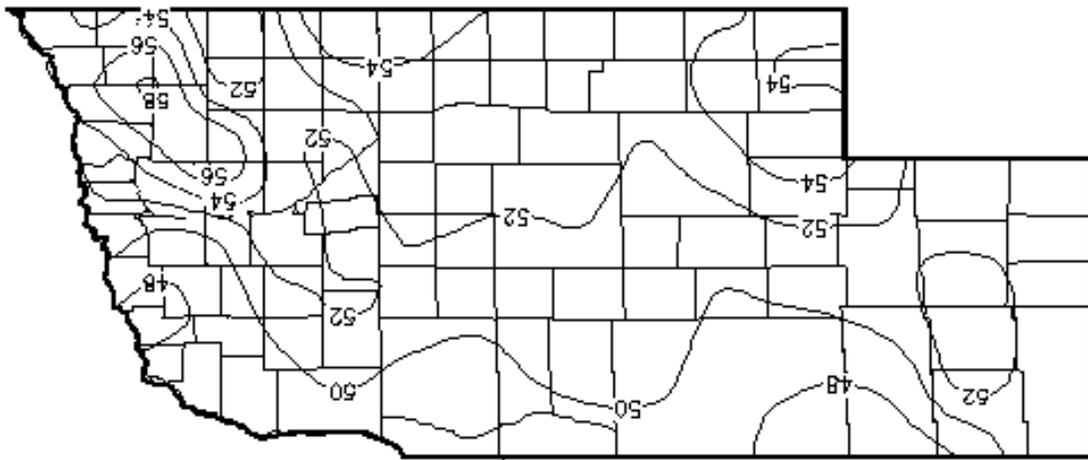
JEFFERSON: Field work is beginning. Moisture conditions are better going into the planting season this year than in the past two years however the subsoil moisture is still somewhat short.

OTOE: The recent rains have been welcome by area producers. Ponds have water in them once again.

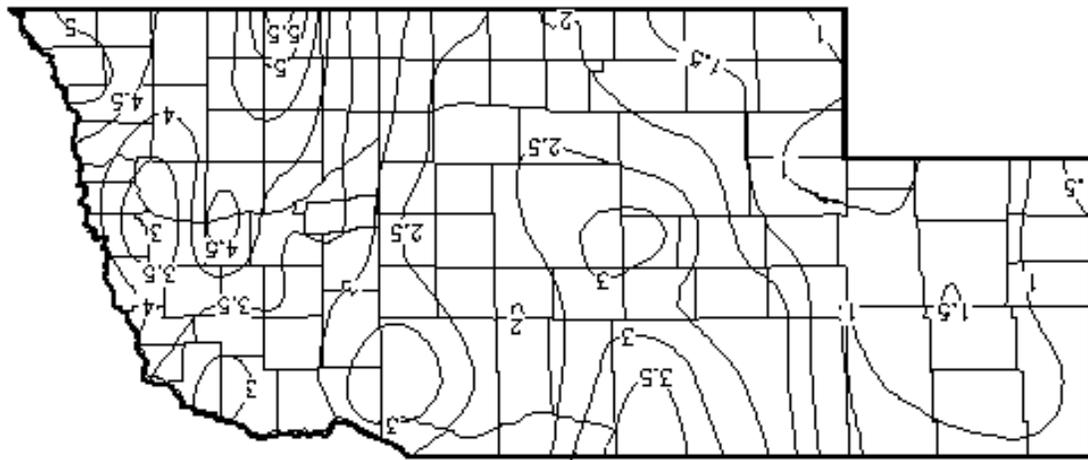
OFFICIAL BUSINESS
PENALTY FOR PRIVATE USE, \$300

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

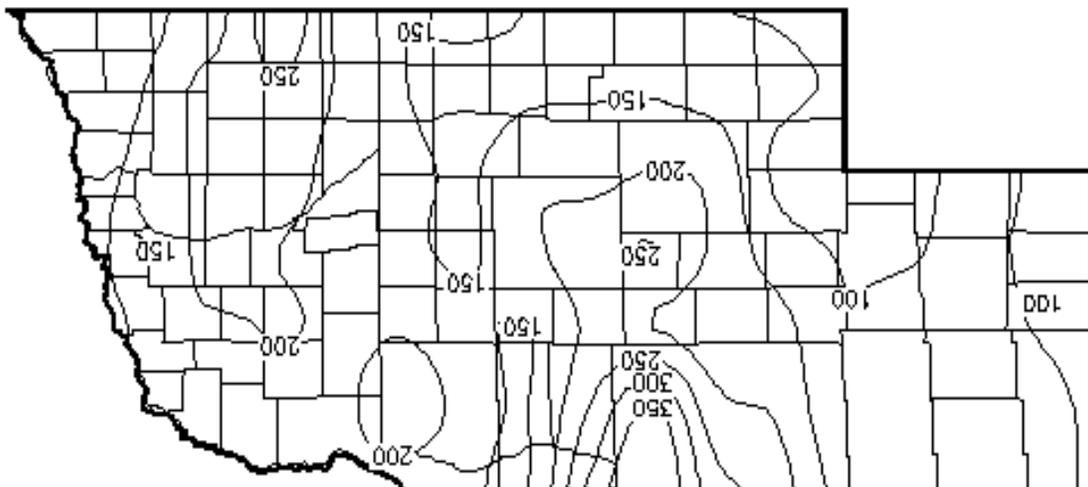
Source: High Plains Regional Climate Centers Automated Weather Data Network (AWDN).



AVERAGE TEMPERATURE AT THE FOUR INCH DEPTH UNDER BARE SOIL
MARCH 22 - MARCH 28, 2004¹



PRECIPITATION IN INCHES MARCH 1 - MARCH 28, 2004¹



PRECIPITATION AS PERCENT OF NORMAL MARCH 1 - MARCH 28, 2004¹