

2003 AGRICULTURAL SUMMARY

January was a month of extreme temperatures. Unseasonably warm weather preceded two major Arctic blasts in consecutive weeks. Temperatures in the 80's were replaced by 10's on the Panhandle and 30's as far down as South Texas. Precipitation was short for most of the state. A majority of the rain fell in South Central Texas and the Upper Coast in the first half of the month with most gauge readings reporting an inch or less. All other areas of the state were fairly dry as the cold fronts failed to bring much moisture. Soil moisture levels began to fall in many areas. The moisture from rain and snow received in the Panhandle during December was drying up due to warm temperatures and strong winds. The Trans-Pecos and Edwards Plateau regions also had low soil moisture problems. Harvest of remaining cotton, peanuts, sorghum and pecans was complete. Fieldwork across the state primarily consisted of deep breaking the soil and some top dressing of small grains. Most wheat was reported in good shape, but by month's end, some fields were showing signs of drought stress. Supplemental feeding of livestock increased during the month as conditions deteriorated. Some sickness in livestock was attributed to the wide swings in temperatures. Greenbugs and ticks were a problem, but freezing conditions slowed them down a bit.

February had a variety of temperature extremes and icy weather. Brief periods of 70 and 80 degree weather were always followed by heavy rain and freezing precipitation. On the Panhandle, moisture was generally short all month as most came in the form of snow and ice. North, East and Central Texas were blanketed with ice for almost three days. From North Texas down through Central, East and the Upper Coast, producers had to deal with wave after wave of rain showers; usually a decent downpour once a week. Soil moisture was low on the Plains and the Trans Pecos. The Rio Grande Valley had generally adequate soil moisture. The rest of the state, however, experienced a surplus. Fieldwork on the Plains continued to consist of deep breaking and listing to prepare for summer crops as well as top dressing of small grains. In the Valley, harvest of sugarcane, citrus and vegetables occurred and early plantings of cotton, corn and sorghum began. In North, Central, East Texas, the Upper Coast and the Coastal Bend, most fieldwork was non-existent due to the constant barrage of rain and ice. The major casualty of this weather was the corn crop. Corn producers were delayed in land preparation and planting all month and there was no end in sight by March 1. Wheat condition was in generally good shape, but there was concern about the future as moisture remained short.

In **March**, Texas welcomed the official arrival of Spring, but Winter still lingered as cold fronts made weekly appearances. The Panhandle experienced generally normal temperatures of 60's and 70's for daytime highs and lows in the 30 to 40 degree range. When cold fronts moved through, lows dropped to the 10's and 20's in some locations. Precipitation was mostly in liquid form and amounted to 1/2 to 3/4 inches over the general Panhandle region. There were a few areas west and north of Amarillo that received an inch or more of rain for the month. North, Central and South Texas received rainfall in the 1 to 1-1/2 inch range, with most falling in the form of light drizzle. Many locations in East Texas

recorded around 2 inches of precipitation. The Edwards Plateau and Trans Pecos received a trace to an inch of rain. Western sections were drier than eastern locations. The Rio Grande Valley recorded an inch of rain over the general area with some very isolated regions receiving up to 3 inches. Soil moisture was still short on the Panhandle, Trans Pecos and much of the Edwards Plateau. As for the rest of the state, the soil was finally drying out enough to plant corn and sorghum as producers worked intensely to beat insurance and biological deadlines. By month's end, most corn was planted in central and southern areas. For those producers that were too late with corn planting, sorghum became an adequate substitute. The wheat crop was variable in the state as those locations where rain or snow fell were benefitting while much of the crop was lacking moisture. Some producers were delaying irrigation because of high fuel prices. There was some frost damage in areas where wheat had come out of dormancy. Land preparation continued in cotton fields and pre-watering occurred on the Panhandle. Some fields on the Coastal Bend required replanting after heavy rain. Rice planting began where conditions allowed. Crawfish harvest continued in extreme Southeast Texas. Range and pastures improved with the warmer temperatures, but still suffered in drier locations. Cattle producers contended with lice infestations. Spring calving, lambing and kidding continued.

Severe weather was the big story in the State for the month of **April**. Storms packing high winds, very large hail and torrential rains tore through locations of the Low Rolling Plains, North Central and Northeast Texas. Numerous tornadoes and large hail caused localized damage to small grains and a few early corn and sorghum fields. Rain accumulations in those regions for the month were generally 1 to 2 inches with isolated locations reporting 4 to 6 inches. In the Rio Grande Valley, a super cell thunderstorm of historic proportions blew through, causing destruction along its path. Spurred on by a stalled cold front, the super cell was born around Falcon Reservoir. From there it moved east; spanning about a mile on each side of the Rio Grande river. There were reports of 60 mph winds blowing hailstones of up to 3 inches in diameter. Before moving out into the Gulf, the storm destroyed onions, cotton, melons, citrus and sorghum. Other regions that reported precipitation included East Texas and eastern areas of the Upper Coast. These regions generally recorded 1 to 2 inches, with some locations reporting up to 4 inches of rain. The Panhandle and the Edwards Plateau experienced a trace to 1/2 inch of precipitation, with isolated locations reporting close to 2 inches. Central Texas, western areas of the Upper Coast and the Trans Pecos recorded little or no rain. Wheat conditions continued to decline on the Panhandle due to dry conditions. Corn planting began on the Panhandle. Cotton producers in northern regions were pre-watering and applying herbicides. Insects were noticed in cotton stands in southern locations. Planting of peanuts, rice and other crops were ongoing in various areas. Army worms and aphids were a problem in small grains. Horn flies were prevalent on cattle.

Drought conditions continued in many areas of the State in **May**. However, they were lessened somewhat due to widespread rain in the latter half of the month. The weather was hot and dry early in the month all across the State, with some thermometer readings breaking the 100 degree mark in the Edwards Plateau and Trans Pecos regions. Moisture shortages and high winds were prevalent in nearly all areas. Severe storms were experienced throughout Central, North and East Texas by mid-month. Several tornadoes

and large hail were reported. Near the end of the month, a late Spring cold front pushed through, dropping temperatures and providing much needed rainfall to the High Plains and other nearby regions. The front brought a good general rain of up to 3 inches to an area between I-20 and the Red River. North Central Texas as well as locations in the Edwards Plateau experienced up to 6 inch rain accumulations for the month. The Upper Coast and Coastal Bend received little or no rain, further stressing summer crops. Soil moisture was lacking in all regions as the rain that was received was not enough to relieve long term drought. Wheat condition deteriorated throughout the month. Maturity came very quickly with high temperatures. By month's end, harvest was active in all areas except the northern High Plains. Corn planting was wrapping up on the Plains. Fields in southern regions were stunted due to drought and began to tassel prematurely because of the heat. Cotton planting was in full swing, but some dryland producers were still waiting for rain before planting. Sorghum, peanuts and soybeans were being planted on the Plains. Rangeland and pastures were drying up in many locations. Stockers were being moved to feedlots. Supplemental feeding was necessary in drier areas.

June brought relief for many farmers in the form of above average rainfall. Unfortunately, along with the rain came high winds, tornadoes and hail which caused significant crop damage. Rain was very heavy throughout the Plains, Cross Timbers, Edwards Plateau and East Texas. Typical accumulations totaled from 5 to 6 inches of rain, but in some locations gauge readings were as high as 12 inches. Amounts of 3 to 4 inches of moisture were common across all other regions. Wheat was harvested throughout the month when conditions allowed. Lodging occurred in fields that were hit by high winds and hail. Precipitation was advantageous to corn fields on the High Plains. In southern regions, the rain came too late for drought stricken fields as many acres were being zeroed out. Cotton planting wrapped up as insurance deadlines arrived. Cotton fields were hit hard by severe storms all month long. Many producers planted sorghum or soybeans behind disastered cotton. Early sorghum combining began in the Rio Grande Valley. Peanut planting was complete and fields benefitted from the increased moisture. Earlier planted fields began pegging. Rice fields headed out and made good progress. Range and pastures responded well to the increased moisture, but drier areas still showed drought stress. Supplemental feeding continued where needed. Most stock tank levels rose. Cattlemen were busy weaning and selling calves. Horn and heel flies remained a problem.

July's weather included a strong hurricane in the south and a return to a hot dry pattern on the Plains. The month started off with heavy rains moving up from the Gulf. Early in the month, the Coastal Bend and Upper Coast received 4 to 6 inches of rain as did locations in South Texas and western portions of the Rio Grande Valley. Most of the rain dissipated as it moved north into Central Texas and the Edward Plateau. The most severe weather from the Gulf arrived by mid-month. Hurricane Claudette made landfall near Port O'Connor, slamming the Upper Coast and Coastal Bend with 90 mph winds and torrential rainfall. The category 2 storm dumped an additional 3 to 6 inches of rain over the same regions. Accumulated rainfall for the month on the Coastal Bend, Upper Coast and South Texas was typically around 9 inches. The highest recorded monthly rainfall in the area was over 18 inches. Claudette rendered many fields of corn and sorghum unharvestable due to lodging and flooding. The counties of Calhoun, Jackson, Matagorda, Refugio and Victoria

were declared federal disaster areas. The only other region to experience excess precipitation was East Texas which reported 4 to 8 inches of rain for the month. Several regions reported 100+ degree temperatures. Wheat harvest was completed. Irrigated corn did well on the Plains. By month's end, early corn harvest started in Central Texas. Many fields were disastered on the Upper Coast and Coastal Bend due to drought or Claudette. The last few fields of sorghum were being planted on the Plains. Harvest started in the Rio Grande Valley and the Coastal Bend. Peanuts did well with the increased moisture the previous few weeks, but could have used a little more rain by month's end. Pegging and pod development was ahead of schedule. Rice headed out and early harvest began.

Seasonably hot temperatures and a few severe storms characterized weather in **August**. Much of the State dealt with triple-digit heat. The Panhandle was mostly dry until the end of the month when scattered storms moved through, dropping over 2 inches of rain in some locations. Strong thunderstorms affected North Central and East Texas. Downpours of over 2 inches with damaging winds were reported. Heavy rain blew through the Coastal Bend and South Texas. Accumulations of 4 inches were typical. A tropical depression off the coast of Louisiana caused heavy rain of up to 10 inches in Southeast Texas. The Edwards Plateau saw periods of heavy rains of up to 6 inches. Tropical Storm Erika made landfall about 30 miles south of Brownsville. Winds and rainfall were minimal and less than forecasted. Soil moisture was short in most regions, but improved later in the month where precipitation occurred. Corn harvest made progress through the Blacklands. Irrigation was winding down on the Panhandle in preparation for harvest. Silage cutting began. Cotton made fast progress in the heat, but dryland fields were showing drought stress in many areas. Rain in the latter half of the month delayed harvest in southern locations of the State. Sorghum combining was virtually complete in southern regions by month's end. Harvesting activities moved into North Central Texas. Rice harvest was delayed by rain. Pecan shells were hardening. Winter wheat planting began. Range and pastures were suffering in the heat. Horn flies were numerous on cattle.

Very heavy rain along the Gulf coast was the big weather story in **September**. All month long, cold fronts collided with tropical moisture to create large areas of strong precipitation. The Upper Coast, Coastal Bend and Rio Grande Valley experienced rainfall amounts ranging from 6 to 12 inches. Severe flooding occurred in some areas, especially in the Valley. Scattered thunderstorms blew through South, Central and North Central Texas. Rain gauge totals typically ranged from 3 to 4 inches, but a couple of locations recorded almost 10 inches of rain for the month. Most areas of the Panhandle received 2 to 6 inches of rain. The South Plains received a trace to 2 inches in some locations. Soil moisture improved in most regions. Irrigation was given a rest for a while where the rains occurred. Wheat planting was ongoing as conditions allowed. Early planted fields began to emerge. Corn harvest began on the Panhandle as silage cutting was wrapping up. Producers dodged the rain when they could to get into the fields. All other corn fields in the State had been combined. Some cotton on the South Plains was damaged by hail early in the month. Rains in the region came too late for many dryland fields that suffered from the previous month's dry conditions. Development was fast, but slowed somewhat due to cold fronts blowing through. By month's end, defolianters were being applied on many fields and early harvest had begun. Sorghum harvest was completed on the Blacklands. Many dryland fields on the Plains that

suffered from drought stress were baled for hay. Irrigated fields looked promising. Early peanut harvest began. The first crop of rice had been harvested by the end of the month. Cabbage and spinach planting occurred in South Texas and the Rio Grande Valley when conditions allowed. Range and pasture conditions improved with the rain, and cattle were in mostly good condition.

October weather was a continuation of above average rainfall for some and the first cold temperatures for others. Heavy rain covered the Edwards Plateau, Central Texas, and the Upper Coast. Anywhere from 2 to 6 inches of rain were common. South Texas and the Rio Grande Valley were inundated by torrential downpours. Rain gauges overflowed with 4 to 12 inch accumulations. Eastern portions of the Trans Pecos experienced heavy rain also. Rainfall amounts totaled over 4 inches in some locations. Scattered thunderstorms rolled across the Panhandle as some areas received 2 inches of rain. There was some hail embedded in the storms, causing a few crop losses. Late in the month, a strong cold front came down, resulting in a frost and light snow on the Panhandle. Soil moisture improved in northern regions where rain fell, but southern areas were saturated. Producers continued to plant wheat. Fields benefitted greatly from the increased moisture and cooler temperatures. Army worms were a problem in wheat all month long. Corn harvest neared completion on the Panhandle by month's end. Cold, wet weather slowed cotton development on the South Plains where some cotton acreage was lost to hail. In the wettest locations, cotton was stringing out and sprouting. When conditions allowed, harvest continued and gained momentum by late month. Sorghum harvest was ongoing on the Plains. Some acreage was also lost to hail. A few fields of late planted sorghum were lost to freezing temperatures. Producers were digging peanuts when field conditions allowed. The rice ratoon crop was being cut. Harvest of oranges and sugarcane was constantly delayed by rain. Pecan harvest had begun. Cattle were in good shape and supplemental feeding increased by the end of the month.

November turned out to be an early preview of Winter for some regions. A series of cold fronts blew through the State. Temperatures dropped into the 10's and 20's on the Plains and the 30's and 40's for most other regions. Strong storms occurred when the cold fronts met up with Gulf moisture over the Upper Coast, North Central and East Texas. Rainfall amounts ranged from 2 to 6 inches. One location received over 10 inches of accumulated rainfall. The Panhandle experienced minimal precipitation, ranging from 1/2 to 2 inches of rain in isolated locations. A few areas of South Texas and the Rio Grande Valley also saw about 2 inches of rain. Soil moisture conditions were mostly short on the Plains, but still plentiful in southern and eastern regions. Wheat fields were needing rain by month's end. Some dryland fields did not emerge. Where growth was adequate, stockers were turned out. North Central Texas wheat was off to a great start. Corn harvest was completed. Most of the remaining sorghum was harvested. Poorer fields were fenced in for Winter grazing. Cotton stripping progressed across the Plains. Late planted cotton failed to develop fully as colder weather moved in. Late in the month, a hard freeze aided in defoliation. Peanut and pecan harvest progressed and neared completion by month's end. The ratoon rice crop was finished. Sweet potato harvest wound down. Harvest of citrus, spinach, and cabbage were active. Onion planting was ongoing. Supplemental feeding increased and cattle were put on winter pastures.

December was a cold and dry month for the entire western half of the State. Several dry cold fronts rolled through, dropping temperatures down into the 10's in northern regions and just below freezing as far down as the Coastal Bend. Even the Rio Grande Valley dropped down into the mid-30's. The Panhandle received a couple of snowfalls. Accumulations for the month ranged from 2 to 6 inches. Most rain fell in East Texas and the Upper Coast with amounts ranging from 2 to 5 inches. High winds depleted soil moisture in western regions. A lack of moisture combined with cold winds caused wheat conditions to decline considerably. Some fields had already been grazed out, and producers were pulling cattle off. Greenbugs, aphids and army worms were present early in the month, but declined as colder weather set in. Corn producers in southern regions were applying anhydrous ammonia. Conditions were good for stripping remaining cotton fields. The last of the sorghum was combined. Peanut harvest was virtually complete. Winter vegetables were progressing nicely in the Rio Grande Valley. Citrus, sugarcane, spinach and cabbage harvest were all ongoing. Pecan harvest was nearly finished. Cattle in western regions were contending with frigid conditions and poor winter forage. Health problems due to changing weather were evident in many herds.