

WEATHER AND CROP CONDITIONS

January brought mild temperatures and below normal precipitation despite widespread rain and snow earlier in the month. Dry conditions depleted topsoil moisture supplies; however, small grains and pasture conditions improved with the earlier precipitation. Many producers top-dressed and applied herbicides on small grains during the month in preparation for spring planting. A few farmers were gearing up for early production of watermelons and cantaloupes. By the end of the month, vegetable and tobacco producers were preparing greenhouses for seeding.

February saw above normal temperatures and extremely dry conditions. The dry conditions caused a shortage in the water and reduced pasture growth causing farmers to search for alternate water and feed supplies for livestock. With little to no snow or rainfall, topsoil moisture for the month was at critical levels. As the month came to an end, many farmers were preparing for spring by top-dressing small grains, seeding pastures and adding clover to some fields.

March began with the continuation of dry conditions. As a result, damage to fruits and small grains was reported in some areas. Farmers prepared for planting throughout the month. Tobacco farmers were busy seeding their greenhouses and plant beds, as potato producers began planting. The month ended on a better note, as rains fell across the state, enhancing the overall crop outlook. Topsoil moisture ratings increased nicely, but subsoil moisture levels remained low. Several areas experienced flash flooding, which slowed field work.

April showers and cool, windy weather conditions slowed down pasture growth in some areas, causing farmers to continue feeding hay. In some parts of the state, small grains, hay, and pasture land suffered heavy damages from insects. Land preparation continued as farmers anticipated upcoming crop plantings. During the middle of the month, high temperatures aided the growth of flue tobacco transplants in greenhouses, as well as pastures. In several areas of the state, apples began an early bloom and corn planting got well underway. Toward the end of the month, scattered showers fell throughout the region, improving topsoil moisture but slowing the progress of field work. Windy conditions hindered farmers from spraying insecticides on their crops.

May brought on scattered showers in many parts of the state, which improved topsoil moisture, but slowed the progress of field work. Heavy storms invaded some areas, with hail damage and flooding. Pastures and hay crops progressed nicely, as livestock were turned out on permanent pasture. Vegetable planting was in full swing in some parts of the state. Land preparation for soybeans, cotton, and peanuts was well underway, and some planting had begun. During the middle of the month, cool weather and adequate rainfall were characteristic for most parts of the state. The substantial rainfall helped improve topsoil and subsoil moisture levels. Some counties reported frost and some crop damage. The latter part of the month was hot and dry causing a decline in soil moisture, but allowing for the first hay cutting.

June started out hot and dry. Pasture growth slowed down and crops began to show signs of stress. Mid-month, the state got a break from the heat in the form of light showers, which both cooled the temperatures down and brought some moisture relief to the crops. Pasture growth was slow and crops were still showing stress from the continued dry and hot weather. By the middle of the month, some farmers had to start feeding hay to livestock and several even began culling cattle due to lack of pasture growth and low water reserves. At the end of June, a few areas experienced some rainfall, but conditions remained dry.

July started out hot and dry again with no moisture relief in sight. Water supplies across the state continued to deplete. The dry weather proceeded to stress field crops, hay, and pastures. Some wheat was mowed down for straw harvest. More farmers began culling livestock due to little or no growth in pastures and water reserves drying up. By mid-month, Virginia experienced some much needed rainfall slowing the deterioration of field crops, hay, and pastures stressed by continuing drought conditions. The end of the month saw some much needed rainfall, strongly improving topsoil moisture and reducing the stress on most crops. Water conditions across the state improved, but were still very low causing farmers to continue hauling water to livestock. Soybeans flowered and began filling

July Continued

pod, benefitting from the late July moisture.

August continued to be hot and dry. Some areas got a few scattered showers, but many counties saw no rainfall. This in combination with the increasing hot and dry weather, caused water supplies to further deplete. Extremely dry conditions caused soybeans, hay, and pastures to deteriorate, and farmers irrigated fields where water was available. Farmers continued to haul water and feed hay and silage to livestock. Pests became a large problem in many crops. Fall vegetable planting was slowed down and even stopped in areas where there was no irrigation. Many counties applied for drought disaster relief. Corn harvest began with reports of below average yields. Soybeans began to drop leaves and pods due to the hot and dry conditions. At the end of the month, rain brought some much needed relief to some pastures and hay fields.

September's dry and hot weather caused corn and soybeans to mature more quickly. Vegetable and melon harvest slowed down, but tobacco harvest was in full swing. Cotton defoliating began in some areas of the state. Insufficient water supplies for livestock continued to be a major concern for farmers. Mid-month brought on a few passing showers caused by Tropical Storm Hannah, which seemed to help some pastures and hay fields, but water levels remained low. Corn harvest continued with erratic yields reflecting the dry and hot weather effects. By the end of the month, most parts of Virginia received some precipitation and cooler temperatures, greening up pastures and hay fields in some counties. Producers continued to make hay where

available and some were harvesting native vegetation on small grain land that was not planted with soybeans. Soybean, peanut, and cotton harvests were just getting started.

October temperatures were a little bit cooler, but Virginia did not receive much precipitation. Pastures and hay fields began drying up again. Apple harvest continued yielding small apples from the earlier hot and dry weather. Small grain seeding proceeded in some parts of the state where the ground contained enough topsoil moisture. Soybean harvest proved to be more difficult than expected as they were ripening unevenly. Tobacco, cotton, and peanut harvests were in full swing with great variations in yields. Temperatures remained cooler around the middle of the month with some precipitation. The rain greened up pastures and hay fields and helped maintain topsoil moisture for small grain seeding. By the end of the month, rains helped replenish water supplies in a few parts of the state. However, harvesting and small grain seedings were slowed by the precipitation.

November brought with it more cool weather and excellent rainfall. The precipitation helped boost fall pasture and hayfield conditions, as well as the small grain growth. However, it put a damper on fall harvesting and small grain seeding. The rain also hampered the baling of hay that was on the ground. By the middle of the month, field work was almost at a standstill due to saturated soils and continuing precipitation. By the end of the month, some areas of the state reported some snow and frost damage. More hay was being fed to livestock as pastures began dying off.

December began with large amounts of rainfall and much cooler temperatures. Many counties reported extreme moisture in the form of rain and snow, making field conditions very muddy and prompting the start of winter feeding on several farms. Some of the crops were left standing in the fields as the precipitation hindered and even stopped harvesting activities. Small grain acreage was down due to the inability of farmers to plant in the wet fields. Hay supplies began getting tight early in the season as many farmers were trying to locate hay for the rest of the winter. Most counties reported full ponds and running springs due to the rainfall keeping hopes high for adequate irrigation in the spring.

