

# WASHINGTON CROP WEATHER

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## Crop and Weather Information for the Month of March 2004

### WESTERN

**Grays Harbor:** An ubiquitous tapestry of pastel colors continued to unfold across the rural landscape in Grays Harbor County. Ribbons of chartreuse foliage cascaded down the hills and across valley floors, as the new foliage of cottonwood, alders and other native trees and shrubs emerged. While this tapestry was highly visible, another tapestry lay on the soil surface as native trilliums, yellow johnny jump ups and mayflowers joined fields of commercial tulips and daffodils in spectacular bloom. Changing weather patterns added additional interest as solar wavelengths were reflected from plant foliage, resulting in darkened or lightened hues. The rural landscape this time of the year is nothing short of inspirational, with tapestries of color that rival paintings by the world's greatest artists. Although ag producers reveled in the beauty of the local area, they were also anxious to begin field preparation for spring planting. Soils remained super-saturated, preventing any soil cultivation. Christmas tree growers were finishing up their planting for this year with the main varieties continuing to be Douglas, Grand, and Nobel fir. Dairymen were pumping manure lagoons onto surrounding fields. Below freezing temperatures late in the month, resulted in damage to Asian pear orchards which were in full bloom. Greenhouse tomato growers reported some plants were already producing flowers, creating visions of plump, red tomatoes to be harvested in just three short months.

**Grays Harbor/Lewis:** March has been drier than usual up to this point, with only a couple of inches of rain in most areas. Livestock were being grazed in many areas. The ground is almost dry enough for spring tillage to begin in earnest.

**Kitsap:** Warm, dry weather inspired area farmers to get fields ready for planting. Plowing and other tillage operations will have fields and planting beds ready for the first seeding for early vegetables. One area Farmer's Market will open on April 17, with most others starting by the first Saturday in May.

**Pacific:** With warming springtime weather, pasture and field conditions were improving with limited early season activities. Equipment, fencing, and irrigation system maintenance and repair continued in preparation for seasonal operations. Cranberry growers were repairing dikes and applying sand to bogs. Shellfish growers were busy preparing culch for seed set, and transplanting oysters for fattening and growout. Harvest of both oysters and hardshell clams continued at higher than normal levels.

**Pierce/King:** There were no unusual situations to report and no crop damage reported due to a weather situation. The weather has been a little above normal for March. The Fife area reported they are about two weeks ahead in planting due to the good weather. Other areas in the South Puget Sound reported normal planting.

**Skagit:** Commercial tulip fields were blooming a few days earlier than normal. Several fields were disked, although most ground was still too wet and there was standing water in many fields. Overwintering cabbage for seed seemed to have survived the cold spell earlier in the year. Rye cover crops were starting to grow rapidly.

**Snohomish/King:** Mild spring weather prevailed. There were many sunny days along with plenty of rain. Temperatures hit 70 degrees for two days. Fruit tree pruning ended and many stone fruits were in bloom. Fieldwork got underway as weather allowed. Standing water remained in many lowland fields. Hay supplies were good, and considerable silage remained in bunkers.

**Thurston:** Typical cold, wet spring weather continued to severely limit field activity, with the exception of turfgrass growers who were able to do some cultivation on sandy soils. Christmas tree growers were nearing completion on planting and getting ready to apply herbicides and fertilizer. Some growers reported minor infestations of Silver Spotted Tiger moth in Douglas fir plantations. Temperatures plummeted to below freezing near the end of the month, producing visible injury to early blooming tree fruit blossoms. Livestock producers were cross fencing pastures to maximize grazing potential. Dairymen began pumping lagoons and applying liquid manure to forage fields. Home gardeners took advantage of several sunny, dry days to mow the lawn and begin sprucing up their ornamental plantings. Retail nurseries and garden stores reported strong sales of early blooming ornamental perennials.

## CENTRAL

**Benton:** Pruning fruit trees and grape vines was nearly complete. Very little frost protection has been necessary. Seed bed preparation and dormant sprays were the main activities.

**Grant:** Columbia Basin 2004 wool clip has been contracted. Wind caused sporadic blowouts of alfalfa, timothy hay, radish seed, and wheat crops. Potato, onion, sweet corn, and pea (green and seed) planting was underway. For the past two weeks, peas have been planted. Over half of the overwintered carrot and crucifer seed crops were lost due to winter weather.

**Kittitas:** Calving season was mostly complete. Lambing was 60-70 percent complete. Range and pastures were greening up rapidly with good moisture from persistent snow late this winter. Irrigated pastures were slowly greening, with many animals turned out already. Timothy hay new seedings were mostly 2-4" tall, and established fields began to produce leaves as well. Temperatures have been conducive to growth throughout much of March.

**Ferry/Okanogan:** The counties have experienced windy condition and warmer than normal temperatures. Portions of the counties received some precipitation in the form of rain showers. Orchardists were pruning. Fieldwork began in the wheat and hay fields.

**Yakima:** Average temperature in March averaged from 5 degrees below normal to 13 degrees above normal, with .44 of an inch of precipitation. No new crop damage due to weather conditions were reported.

## EASTERN

**Adams:** Winter wheat remained in fair condition with some reseeding done because of a late fall cold snap. Above average precipitation is needed to improve crop conditions as subsurface moisture was in mostly short supply. Spring planting conditions remained marginal with dry, windy conditions.

**Adams (2<sup>nd</sup> Report):** Dry and windy were the operative words to describe March 2004. Most spring activities, including reseeding of small amounts of damaged winter wheat and seeding of CRP grasses, progressed well. Rain would be a welcome visitor. Spraying activities went on between the blustery weather. Cattle were out on spring pastures.

**Asotin/Garfield:** Drier than normal weather persisted during March, allowing farmers in the fields to be 1-2 weeks ahead of normal. Moisture in the soil profile was adequate in Garfield County, but many areas of Asotin County were below normal as winter precipitation was well below normal. Winter wheat was in mostly good condition with little reseeding needed. The crop was smaller than normal in many areas due to the dry weather last fall. Pastures and rangeland began to grow in March; however, moisture was a concern. Some streams and springs were not producing adequate flow. This appeared to be from prolonged drought conditions.

**Lincoln:** Winter wheat remained in fair condition. Above average precipitation is needed to improve crop conditions. Sub-surface moisture throughout the county was extremely variable, but overall it is mostly in short to normal supply. Spring seeding conditions were mostly dry and windy.

**Lincoln (2<sup>nd</sup> report):** Winter wheat on the whole, was generally in fair condition, although some reseeding has occurred in spots. Dry, windy conditions have recently prevailed, so additional precipitation is needed. Spring calving continued to progress.

**Stevens:** Dry conditions allowed farmers to begin working fields earlier than anyone can remember. Areas in fields which were too wet to cross in a normal year were posing no problems this year. Producers that held over calves received good prices during March. Hay has been in plentiful supply and available at reasonable prices.

**Walla Walla:** The weather conditions were mostly dry for the month. There were several days with strong winds. Very welcomed county-wide showers were noted the evening of March 25. Spring work was in full swing and some producers have completed spring seeding. Crops overall appeared in good condition. The recent rain was very timely and will greatly benefit current crop conditions.

**Whitman:** Crop conditions were generally good, but winter wheat was variable. Some winter wheat looked excellent, but other fields of recrop winter wheat were uneven and thin. Favorable conditions in March have jump started spring work and the planting of spring cereals was at least 2 weeks ahead of schedule. Mild conditions in March also benefitted livestock operations, with the good weather helping calving and lambing.

**Whitman (2<sup>nd</sup> report):** March came in like a lamb and appears to be going out like a lamb. Mild, warm, dry conditions allowed an early start to spring work on the Palouse. Much of the ground in the county has been worked and seeded. Even the wetter northeast corner of the county had tractors out kicking up dust. When all is said and done, rainfall totals for March will probably be 50 percent less than normal. Soil profile moisture seems to be holding up further down, but the top few inches is drying out. Much of the spring cereals have been seeded, but producers were waiting to put in pulse crops. Spraying of winter wheat was hampered by windy conditions. April showers will be needed for the newly seeded spring crops.



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