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GENERAL: For the month of December 2002, producer activities included fieldwork, applying anhydrous ammonia, and livestock care, according to the USDA's Nebraska Agricultural Statistics Service. Temperatures were above normals for the second month in a row. With minimal moisture received last month, the western half of the state continued to be rated in extreme drought. Cattle and calves fared well but wheat condition declined from a month ago.

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.agr.state.ne.us/agstats/cropwthr.htm>

WEATHER: Weekly temperatures averaged above normals during December. Highest readings were 10 to 15 degrees above normals during the second week. Statewide, moisture was minimal.

CROPS: **Wheat** condition declined this past month, rated 11 percent very poor, 11 poor, 40 fair, 35 good, and 3 excellent, and remains below last year's condition at this time. **Hay and forage** supplies were mostly adequate to short statewide. The mild weather allowed producers to limit the feeding of hay supplies.

LIVESTOCK: **Cattle and calves** condition rated 2 percent poor, 27 fair, 57 good, and 14 excellent. Supplemental feeding requirements were below normal as cattle were able to graze stalk fields throughout the month.

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

NORTHWEST

DAWES : Lack of moisture a mixed blessing. It helps stretch the feed supplies but we also need the moisture.

SCTBLFF/MORRILL : Lack of winter moisture is the main concern among growers. Field work is complete and growers are talking about how to manage the growing season with predictions of below normal water for irrigation.

NORTH CENTRAL

HOLT/BOYD : Moisture is needed badly for the wheat, to fill dams and provide protection for plants. The mild weather has reduced use of forage products.

HOLT : It is extremely dry in this area. Received very little snow as precipitation this winter.

NORTHEAST

ANTELOPE : With no snow cover, cattle are still on corn stalks and receiving supplemental feed. Some problems with sick calves due to dust pneumonia because of dry lots.

BOONE/GREELEY : Dry conditions. Some snow late Sunday night. Hay supplies are short but cattle have had good weather for grazing stalks and this helps to stretch our supplies.

BURT CO : Lack of moisture is a concern at this time.

DIXON : The mild weather has kept the harvested fields open in the month of December-unusual conditions have fostered farmstead improvements including a great deal of fencing, cleanup, etc.

KNOX : Open weather is making for a easy feeding time. Cow condition is about average. Corn stocks are being well utilized.

THURSTON : A very mild winter to this point. Much more fall field work has been completed than normal.

Concern that more insects will survive the winter than normal making problems in 2003 crops.

EAST CENTRAL

CASS : Cattle on stalks, very dry.

COLFAX : December was extremely dry. The cattle are taking full advantage of crop residue grazing, which is helping out with the short hay supplies from last summer.

DODGE : Moisture for December - extremely dry. Gleaning of fields by livestock has been above average,

NANCE/BOONE : Livestock producers moving hay into yards. Cattle still grazing corn stalks.

YORK : Anhydrous was still being applied after Christmas.

SOUTHWEST

FRONTIER/GOSPER : With no cover for the winter wheat, many are worried there will be a lot of winter kill.

HAYES/HITCHCOCK : Reports of sick calves due to dust. Very dry and warm. Wheat continues to dry out and get thinner.

SOUTHCENTRAL

HARLAN : The mild weather has made it ideal for grazing crop residue. It will be a close call if there will be enough hay to reach spring grazing.

WEBSTER : Prices in all areas of crops and livestock are very weak. There is a desperate lack of moisture that will have an extremely negative impact next spring.

SOUTHEAST

GAGE: Open winter so far has helped livestock producers stretch forage resources.

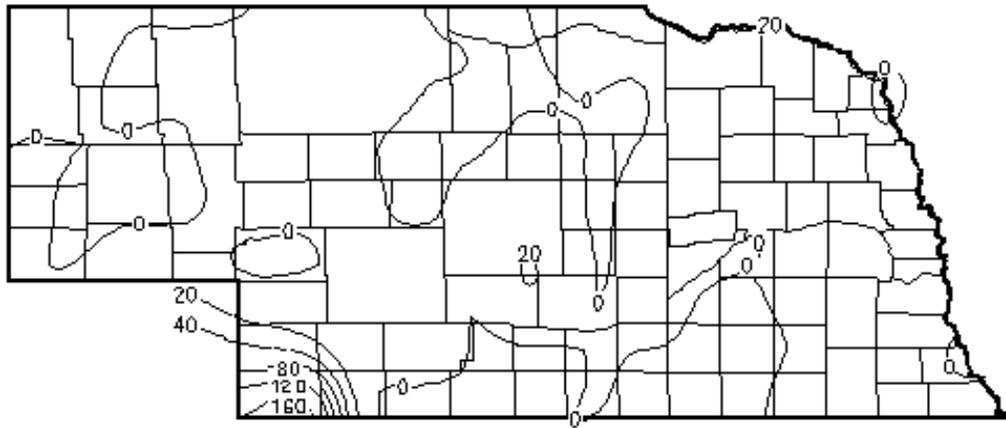
JEFFERSON : Conditions are extremely dry. A high percentage of fieldwork has been done this fall due to weather conditions.

NEMHA/JHSN/PAWNEE : The open winter to this point has allowed cattle producers to utilize the corn, grain sorghum and soybean residue. Producers have been able to do conservation work due to the mild weather conditions. Cow/calf producers are concerned about the poor conditions of their pastures and the availability of forage for 2003.

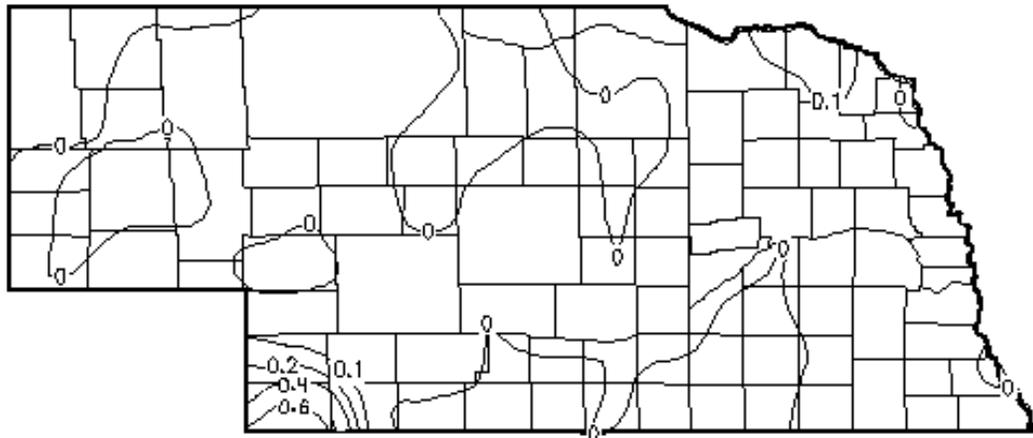
OTOE : Moisture is desperately needed. There is no subsoil moisture left. Ponds are dry and the pastures are in very bad shape.

PAWNEE : Fall field work continued up to two weeks ago. The warmer weather pattern has allowed more fall grazing and use of stalks etc. Very little supplemental feeding compared to normal conditions for this time of year.

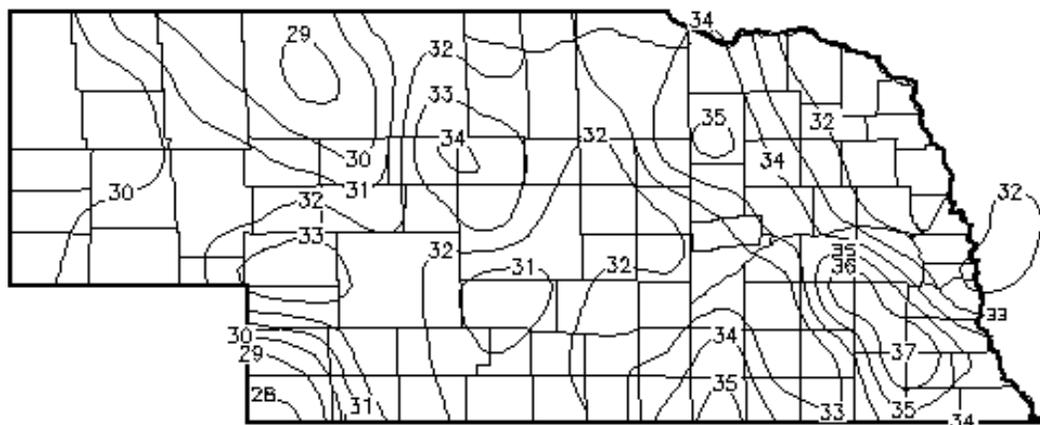
PRECIPITATION AS PERCENT OF NORMAL FOR DECEMBER 2002¹



PRECIPITATION IN INCHES FOR MONTH OF DECEMBER 2002¹



SEVEN DAY AVERAGE TEMPERATURE AT THE FOUR INCH DEPTH UNDER BARE SOIL¹



¹ Source: High Plains Regional Climate Centers Automated Weather Data Network (AWDN).