

THE ATMOSPHERIC RESERVOIR

Examining the Atmosphere and Atmospheric Resource Management

A Balanced North Dakota Harvest?

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This growing season has been a rollercoaster ride for many of North Dakota's producers. In the western part of the state there were reports of total crop loss due to the drought and out east many farmers will have above average wheat yields.

It appeared that the drought was waning for much of the state when substantial rains returned during the last week of May and beginning of June. However, by mid-June the rains ceased, leaving farmers and ranchers in bewilderment. Many farmers missed out on mid-season rains that are so vital to North Dakota's

wheat crop during early to mid July, resulting in poor yields due to unfilled heads. The rains returned once again in late July and early August and provided row crops with some relief.

Areas of western North Dakota where the drought had the most prevalent effects generally included cropland from Grenora to Parshall, within the Little Missouri National Grassland, and from Dickinson to just north of Bowman.

In extreme cases, farmers were unable to hay their wheat crops because they weren't tall enough to be swathed, though rains in late July

and early August brought some hope of a second cutting of alfalfa.

Fortunately, North Dakota's producers didn't experience the 100-degree heat witnessed during the last two growing seasons, giving moisture-deprived crops some

get their crops harvested. A common theme this year in western North Dakota is, "take any rain we can get, whenever we get it," to replenish soil moisture and recover from the drought. Many eastern North Dakota farmers were hoping for drier conditions in August for

wheat harvest, but could use a shot of rain to help their corn and soybeans along.

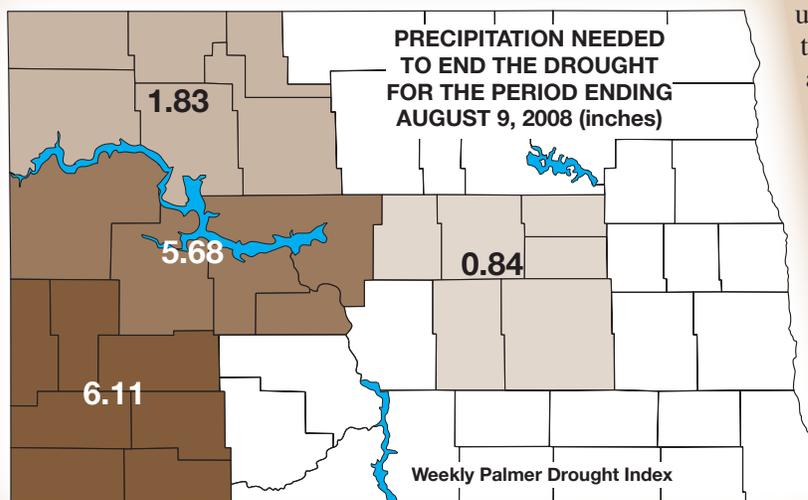
What is still quite evident is the precipitation deficit in western North Dakota where an additional five to six inches are needed to bring the region out of its drought. Considering that the average annual precipitation for western North

Dakota is only 14-16 inches, that's asking a lot from Mother Nature.

Climatologically, September provides our state with only one to two inches of precipitation, so North Dakotans will be looking ahead to winter snows with eager eyes and hoping once again for rains next spring to end the persistent drought.

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reprieve. There was also less disease and stress on crops this season due to cooler temperatures and lackluster rainfall.

The early August USDA report on crop yields showed the effects of drought, with Durum averaging only 25 bushels/acre. Durum is primarily grown in the northwestern portion of our state, where drought conditions still have a grip. Spring wheat was averaging 34 bushels/acre, which is a result of averaging yields from across the state.

During an average growing season, most farmers want the rains to stop during August so they can