



2003 Weather in Review

Farmers were getting into the field in all areas of the State by the first week of April. Periodic rainfall caused some delay during the month but by the end of April over 70 percent of the ground intended for spring crops had been worked at least once and 60 percent of the corn had been planted, both slightly ahead of the 5-year average. The wheat crop was making good progress and pastures were beginning to recover from the poor condition of the previous fall. Average precipitation for April was 4.23 inches, compared with the 30-year average of 3.80 inches.

The first half of May was wet over most of the State with flash flooding and hail occurring primarily in the northeastern, central and southern counties. Wind damage to trees and buildings was reported over a wide area. Working conditions later improved and farmers had 96 percent of the corn and 61 percent of the soybeans planted by the end of the month. Repeated heavy rains in the Bootheel sharply delayed cotton planting but farmers caught up to just over a week late, at 90 percent complete by the end of May. The wheat crop was in 65 percent good or excellent and progressing on schedule with virtually all headed and about half turning color by late May. Over the State rainfall averages varied widely during May, ranging from 3.19 inches in the northwest district to 8.66 inches in the southeast district. State rainfall for the month averaged 5.02 inches, compared with the 30-year average of 4.68 inches.

Early to mid-June weather provided sufficient rain in most areas to keep row crops and pastures in fair to good condition but delayed completion of single crop soybean planting. The wheat harvest began around mid-month and quickly spread over the State with record yields reported and reaching 70 percent complete by month's end. Progress of haying moved a few days ahead of normal with 45 percent of the second cutting of alfalfa and 81 percent of other hay cut by June 30. Some areas were becoming short of topsoil moisture by late June, mostly in the west-central district. June rainfall averaged 4.96 inches, well above the normal of 4.29 inches.

Farmers remained optimistic on the outlook for row crops well into July but some serious moisture shortages began developing early in the month and got worse as warm, dry weather prevailed. Temperatures of 100 degrees for a few days in many western counties during the third week of the month caused severe stress to crops and pastures, with other areas also suffering to a lesser extent from the general moisture shortage. Development of corn reached 51 percent in the dough stage and 15 percent dented by the end of July, similar to normal, while soybeans were 58 percent blooming and 26 percent podding, several days behind average. July rainfall ranged from around 1.25 inches in the northwest and west-central districts, to 5.05 inches in the southeast. The State averaged 2.49 inches, well below the 3.76 inch 30-year average.

Dry weather prevailed through most of August along with several periods of heat until the last weekend of the month when cool temperatures and heavy rains occurred. Condition of both corn and soybeans fell during the month to being over 50 percent rated poor or very poor, while pasture condition fell to 75 percent poor or very poor. The worst drought damage was in some of the same areas that were hurt a year earlier, in the northwest, west-central and

central districts. Hay feeding became common as pasture feed became insufficient to support normal grazing in many counties. Dry weather and heat speeded maturity of soybeans as 90 percent were setting pods and 18 percent were turning color by August 31. Corn was 52 percent mature and 9 percent was harvested, similar to normal. Cotton had 11 percent with bolls opening, 10 days behind average. The heavy rain of late August was too late to help crops show any significant recovery in the drought areas. Rainfall for the month averaged 5.98 inches, compared with the long-term normal of 3.73 inches.

The wet, cool weather of early September delayed some early corn harvesting but was of some help to late soybeans and of considerable benefit to pastures. More favorable harvesting weather during the last half of the month permitted the corn harvest to reach 59 percent complete, while 7 percent of the soybeans, 38 percent of the sorghum and 55 percent of the rice were harvested. Pasture growth showed steady improvement through September but pastures in the northwest district, which had suffered severe drought earlier and received much less rain during September, were still rated as 77 percent poor or very poor condition. Rainfall during September averaged 5.32 inches, well above the normal of 4.22 inches, and varying from 2.97 inches in the northwest district to 5.32 inches in the southeast.

The corn harvest continued at a normal pace during October, reaching 92 percent complete by the end of the month. Harvesting of other row crops progressed well behind normal due to later maturing as well as periodic damp, cool weather through the month. By the end of October about 71 percent of the soybeans, 82 percent of the sorghum, 65 percent of the cotton and virtually all of the rice were harvested. Farmers had also seeded 75 percent of the intended wheat acreage for 2004, similar to the normal pace, with adequate moisture in most areas helping the crop get off to a good start. October rainfall averaged 2.05 inches, well below the 30-year average of 3.37 inches.

Farmers had generally favorable weather for late row crop harvesting during the first 3 weeks of November and completed virtually all grain and soybean harvesting before the end of the month. The cotton harvest proceeded more slowly and extended into December due to some fields being exceptionally late maturing and the repeated heavy rains in the Bootheel. November rainfall averaged 3.95 inches, up sharply from the 3.16 inch average. December averaged 3.29 inches, also well above the 2.67 inch 30-year average.

Precipitation for Missouri in 2003 averaged 40.68 inches, barely above the 40.43 inch average of 2002 and virtually the same as the 30-year 1971-2000 average of 40.67. Nine counties received less than 30 inches of precipitation, compared with 20 counties in that category in 2002. Of the 9 lowest precipitation counties in 2003, all but one of them were in the northwest district. Nodaway County received the least amount at 25.42 inches, followed by Harrison, Gentry and Atchison, all under 26 inches. Butler County received by far the highest precipitation at 69.51 inches, followed by New Madrid at 60.46 inches, Pemiscot 58.20 inches and Wayne 56.61 inches.