



## Heat, Lack Of Rain Has Farmers, Ranchers Coping With The 'D' Word

**YELLVILLE, ARK.**

**A**rkansas farmers should be forgiven if they seem a bit nervous as the temperature climbs and the skies are devoid of rain clouds.

"It is getting downright powdery out there," Brian See, Marion County extension agent for the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture, said Tuesday.

Marion County saw its share of brown pastures due to drought last year and this year's abundant spring rains helped erase drought's traces from the U.S. Drought Monitor map in all but southwestern Arkansas. And while this year's first cutting of hay was a record harvest, "the lack of rain has delayed the second cutting of bermudagrass hay," he said.

"Bermuda grass fields are still green for the most part but are pretty much at a standstill," he said. "Fescue has all but burned up. Producers at least have hay in the barn should things continue to remain dry."

Newton County pastures were also starting to turn brown, said Extension Staff Chair Adam Willis. Lawns and home gardens were starting to crisp up, said Wes Kirkpatrick, Desha County Extension staff chair, who added that a good rain "would lift everyone's spirits!"

There were slim chances of rain for Wednesday and Thursday, the National Weather Service at Little Rock said, also issuing a special weather statement noting an escalation in wildfire danger. Burn bans were in place in Cleveland, Garland, Johnson, Newton, Pope, Saline and Searcy counties Tuesday afternoon. Wildfire danger was moderate for all but 16 eastern Arkansas counties where the danger was rated at low.

### **Turning on the taps**

In the Delta, growers are turning on the taps. "Irrigation is in full swing on all summer crops, even pastures and hay meadows," said Brent Griffin, Prairie County extension staff chair. "Corn, rice and soybeans are all competing for the same water at this time."

Jeremy Ross, extension soybean agronomist for the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture said: "usually soybean fields are last in line behind these other crops to get irrigated. The lower temperatures last week helped the soybean crop, but we are now back into normal July temperatures. Hopefully we'll get some rainfall in the next day or two."

In Lonoke County, "we have several acres of

beans to plant but are waiting on a rain," said County Agent Keith Perkins. "Some producers are watering the ground to plant but most do not have the extra water to do this practice."

"Each day we go in July we give up yield on soybeans and we have to look at economics of planting," he said, with some growers reaching "a point where it is better to leave out the field instead of planting. Each field has to evaluate independently to determine to plant or not."

### **'Looking ugly'**

Cotton is at a key stage and needs the water, said Blake McClelland, cotton verification coordinator. "The state's cotton crop is later than the last couple of years, but this is the time – between full squaring and the first boll opening – when water is the most critical," he said.

Van Banks, Monroe County Extension staff chair said: "sorghum is needing a drink as it begins to push up heads. We have received some scattered showers in the last couple of weeks, but in general, we are getting dry."

Southeastern Arkansas went from wet to dry in a hurry.

Gus Wilson, Chicot County extension staff chair said corn has been irrigated six to seven times and soybeans, four to five times already this summer.

"Those with no water are looking ugly and taking a beating in yield loss right now," he said. "Every well and relift pump is going and will be until a good rain comes." Δ



**Several weeks of dry skies have prompted Arkansas farmers to begin irrigating.**

U of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture file photos by Gus Wilson