

N. Ark Ranchers Welcome Semblance Of Normalcy; Uncertainty Over 2013 Remains



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HARRISON, ARK. Some semblance of normalcy seems to be seeping into parts of the state along with a series of ground-soaking rains, but uncertainty about 2013 lurks below the surface, said extension agents with the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture.

"We're actually cutting hay," Mike McClintock, Boone County extension agent for the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture, said Thursday. With temps dropping below the century mark and between 2.5-4 inches of rain falling in the last few weeks, "The bermudagrass has exploded in the last couple of weeks."

For most hay producers, this is only the second cutting of the year. The first was early, due to spring-like temps in the winter and it was about half the tonnage Boone County growers normally make. In a normal year, the second cutting would be late spring, early summer. The next best news is that the cool temperatures have slowed down the fall armyworms that have eaten their way through newly sprouted grass.

The Oct. 2 map showed drought still covering 99.89 percent of the state, but the deepest drought, "exceptional," remained at just 8.74 percent.

"When you get back to 'kind of normal' it's nice," said McClintock, whose county is still in the exceptional drought area.

He said rain is still needed. "The subsoil moisture still isn't where it should be. We need a lot of rain and some snow this winter," he said. "But it's comforting to know that the landscape can look green and that the sky can actually rain."

Even with the return of rain, there's still a lot of uncertainty over next year. "It's not a good feeling," he said.

McClintock has seen the forecast for a weaker El Nino this winter, which would mean less rain for Arkansas. "I hope they're wrong," he said.

"I'm not sure if beef cattle production in Boone County could survive another year like this. The ranchers have tapped their finances to the point of no return."

A University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture study found that drought this year cost the cattle industry in Arkansas \$128 million in direct losses. (See: <http://bit.ly/SomTFP> and <http://bit.ly/Qfnz0L>)

McClintock said that ranchers who used intensive rotation and managed rotation of their forages and followed the recommendations of the 300-Day Grazing program had grass longer during the drought and were grazing three to four weeks earlier when the drought broke in September.

Despite the drubbing some acres of cotton received in Chicot County by and large, "my bunch feels good," said Chicot County staff chair Gus Wilson. "We had a great corn crop and a great soybean crop and with cotton, hopefully, we'll get back into the fields this weekend."

As for the future, "growers are using every tool at their disposal to stay in the game," he said. "You have to know every option available."

In his county, one tool, irrigation is a must. "If there's a total dryland farmer in my county, I couldn't name him," he said. Dryland farmers in the Midwest suffered devastating losses due to drought.

Wilson is one of the planners for Farm Outlook 2013, a Nov. 6 event to be held at McGehee meant to give growers in southeastern Arkansas a heads up about the Farm Bill, commodity markets, costs to grow next year's crop and crop insurance. Another workshop is being held the same day in Stuttgart by the National Agricultural Law Center.

In shopping the idea around among his clients, Wilson said "It's gotten a lot of positive responses. Knowledge is power." △

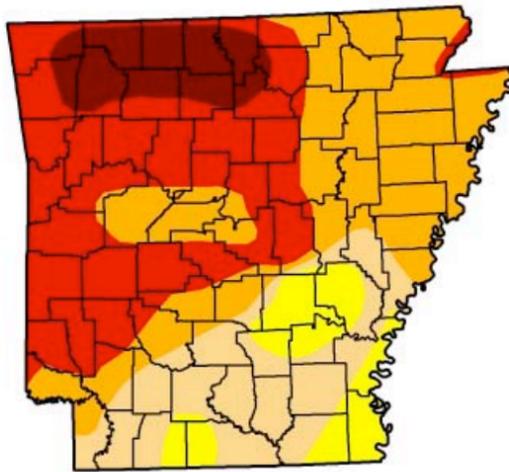
U.S. Drought Monitor

October 2, 2012

Valid 7 a.m. EST

Arkansas

	Drought Conditions (Percent Area)					
	None	D0-D4	D1-D4	D2-D4	D3-D4	D4
Current	0.11	99.89	91.37	73.84	41.96	8.74
Last Week (09/25/2012 map)	0.11	99.89	91.37	73.93	41.99	8.74
3 Months Ago (07/03/2012 map)	0.00	100.00	98.93	87.53	35.96	0.00
Start of Calendar Year (12/27/2011 map)	86.20	13.80	3.95	1.06	0.23	0.00
Start of Water Year (09/25/2012 map)	0.11	99.89	91.37	73.93	41.99	8.74
One Year Ago (09/27/2011 map)	1.21	98.79	75.99	39.48	18.92	1.53



Intensity:

- D0 Abnormally Dry
- D1 Drought - Moderate
- D2 Drought - Severe
- D3 Drought - Extreme
- D4 Drought - Exceptional

The Drought Monitor focuses on broad-scale conditions. Local conditions may vary. See accompanying text summary for forecast statements.

<http://droughtmonitor.unl.edu>



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