

Heavy Rain Helps, Hurts Southwest Agriculture

Spring rain provided much-needed soil moisture for Southwest farmers and ranchers, alleviating concerns about continued drought. But heavy rains caused flooding, which damaged crops and pastures and caused livestock losses, particularly along the Red and Trinity rivers.

Drought reduced Southwest agricultural production in 1989 and was threatening 1990 production. Much of the region was heading into spring with low subsoil moisture. The winter wheat crop had been damaged, and poor pasture conditions forced livestock operators to liquidate their herds. In South Texas, where drought has been a problem for two years, farmers were hesitant to plant into dry soil.

Frequent and above-normal rainfall increased soil moisture (see the map). Areas of Texas, Louisiana and Oklahoma received between 150 percent and 300 percent of normal rainfall between January and April. Soil is still dry in some areas, but most of the Southwest is now favorably moist or wet.

Because of the rain, most of the wheat crop is now rated average or better. Flooding caused some damage, but Texas producers expect to harvest nearly twice as much winter wheat as last year.

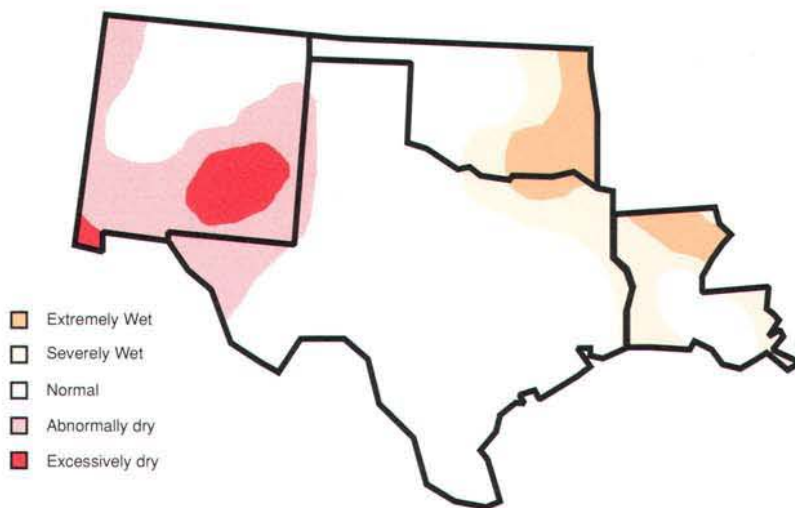
While flooding also caused some livestock losses, range and pasture conditions have improved in most areas, and increased forage is encouraging livestock herd rebuilding.

Rainfall greatly improved conditions in South Texas, where drought plagued farmers for the past two years. Even though subsoil moisture remains below normal, producers are cautiously optimistic about their crops.

Wet weather delayed some planting and land preparation activities. Heavy rains also slowed emergence and growth. Overall, however, many farmers and ranchers welcomed the rainfall, and it has improved the outlook for 1990 agricultural production.

—Fiona Sigalla

Crop Moisture Index
May 12, 1990



NOTE: The Crop Moisture Index measures soil moisture down to five feet below the surface and is used to monitor current soil moisture conditions.

Conference Announcement

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November 15–16, 1990

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If you are a subscriber to *The Southwest Economy*, you will receive information on the conference this summer. If you are not a subscriber, please contact Susan August Brown at (214) 698–4405 to receive information regarding the conference.

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