

Hay Harvest Height

This is Ag Outlook on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Hay is going to be in short supply this year unless something changes really soon and current hay prices are reflecting that concern over availability! So it would be understandable that forage producers would try to get every ounce of harvested forage off those fields as possible. The problem is that the future health of that stand of grass or alfalfa or whatever forage you are harvesting, is directly related to the cutting height. There was a time that we really didn't talk much about cutting height because everyone was using a sickle bar mower and nobody wanted to stick that thing too low and risk knocking a tooth out. Then came the disc mowers. They were faster, they could handle heavier forage loads and you could set those suckers on the ground because you weren't worried about knocking teeth out of the sickle. While this may sound like a great advancement in producing hay, there are issues involved here. When you cut a forage it regrows. To regrow requires food reserves that are left in the plant. For alfalfa, most of that food is in the big tap root. For grasses though, part of the food is in the crown of the plant and part is in the lower stems and leaf blades that are just above ground level. To minimize impact on the forage plant and to insure good regrowth or simply survival of the plant, alfalfa should be mowed no lower than two inches and most grasses need to have 3 inches of stubble left. I've always felt that brome should be mowed four inches tall, so three is a minimum! This has been Ag Outlook on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Culling Herds

This is Ag Outlook on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Some of you are already doing this, but this is one of those summers when cattle producers need to have a plan in mind of how to deal with lack of forage or lack of water. Even if you have water in your ponds right now and forage, you need to face the fact that in about a month you'll need to re-evaluate pastures and then figure out what to do. If you have a stocker herd you have three choices if you run short of pasture - take them some place to feed them on your own property, send them to the feedlot, or sell them. If you have a cow calf herd you have quite a few more options. Start by early weaning the calves. Generally calves should be 45 days old before any early weaning attempt is made. I think we're well past that point but weaning at 3 to 5 months of age can work very well. If you wean and sell them you'll reduce consumption of the forage that they would have eaten and also reduce the amount of forage that the cows need because they no longer have to produce milk. If you have heifers that you want to keep back, there's probably no advantage to early weaning those other than the convenience of doing them all at once. Depending on how short you are on forage, you may want to do an early culling at this point. If that's the case, go back to the four O's, old, open, ornery and oddball. It would be nice if we didn't have to worry about this, but the fact is we're a long way from being out of this drought. It's better to have a drought plan and not need it than to not have a plan at all! This has been Ag Outlook on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Wheat update

This is Ag Outlook on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I haven't given my update on the wheat crop report lately so let's get it over with so we can all be depressed. I'm sure everyone has noticed the wheat turning very quickly now. It's not turning because it's ripening and maturing, it's turning color because it's dying. Wheat is a cool weather crop. It likes daily high temperatures in the 60s and 70s. Once the thermometer hits 80 wheat gets unhappy. When it hits 90 it's pretty much all over. Guess what? We had 25 days during May with temperatures of 80 or above. Wheat isn't going to ripen normally, its just going to shut down and die. There's not enough water in the world to stop that from happening. Yes, if you happen to have irrigated wheat it will yield better than dryland wheat this year, but don't expect a bin buster. I love to be wrong but I'm going out on a limb here and predicting a county average yield in the mid to upper 20s. Given the long range forecast right now for the next 10 days, I just don't see any way we're going to pull much more than that out of many of these fields. As I also said in a program recently, there's going to be a lot of wheat go out the back of the combine as shrunken and shriveled kernels - just be aware. So what about double cropping soybeans, or maybe some emergency forage like sudangrass back in to that wheat stubble? Well, all you're going to be out is the seed and the time to plant it. I've seen many summers that started dry and ended wet or at least wetter. So might as well give it a shot and see what happens! This has been Ag Outlook on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Chinch Bugs

This is Ag Outlook on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. With the wheat turning rapidly, hot weather and nine months of drought behind us, I'm not going to rule out the possibility of seeing an old acquaintance show up in the coming days - chinch bugs. The first thing many of you are going to say is, yeah, but I haven't planted milo for several years. That's fine, I've seen chinch bugs damage corn before also. Chinch bugs are small bugs, true bugs, with a piercing sucking mouthpart. They are native to the prairie regions of Kansas and we just happen to be at ground zero smack in the center of their native range. They will feed on virtually any grass plant. They overwinter in clumps of bunchgrass out in the prairie. From there they often move into wheat fields and then as the wheat starts to dry down, they move into other grassy plants. They don't generally cause much damage in wheat but when they leave wheat fields en masse and there's a corn or sorghum field immediately adjacent, I've seen milo fields go down, a row at a time. In wet weather a fungus builds up that reduces chinch bug populations. In dry weather they thrive. I haven't heard of any problems yet, but given the lack of rainfall chinch bugs are far from anyone's mind. If you see corn adjacent to wheat that suddenly starts to look stunted and yellowing, go out and peel back the outer leaves. Chinch bug nymphs are red, adults are black with a little white. Unfortunately, if you find chinch bugs massing in your corn, we don't have any real options. This has been Ag Outlook on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Rainfall or lack thereof

This is Ag Outlook on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. May was the second hottest May on record.

Precipitation from January to May was the second driest on record - 1966 was drier.

Precipitation from last September to this May was the third driest on record. I don't even have to go any further because you all know the story. Someone asked me the other day what to do with their planning. My response was simple - go forward as if we are going to have normal precipitation. You have no other choice. We can enter paralysis mode and do nothing. But if it starts to rain, you are stuck because you've done nothing. It will start raining again, sometime.

We have reliable rainfall records back to 1931. And yes, this is drier than anytime in the 1930s or 1950s. I looked for periods when September thru May rainfall was less than 67% of normal.

This happened 8 previous times since 1931. In every single year when you had a 9 month period that was 2/3 or less of normal rainfall, the following three months were average or above average rainfall. Is that a guarantee that it will happen again? Of course not. But I'd say there's a strong likelihood that we will see increasing precipitation in the months ahead. Did it always happen right away in June? No, but it often did. Through all of those years my favorite may be 1950.

From September 1949 through May of 1950 we had 64% of normal rainfall. June was close to normal rainfall and July of 1950 we had 13.65" of rain. We had more rain in July of 1950 than July of 1951. This has been Ag Outlook on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.