

## **Rain, Rain... We Best Not Complain!**

### **AGRI-VIEWS**

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

Feast to famine often seems to be the trend of precipitation in the Great Plains, as we have seen in recent months. We can go for two months with virtually no precipitation and then receive two months worth of rain in two weeks. These kinds of trends can be expected and possibly even more so, according to research climatologists, with global warming. While we can't do anything about the rain, there is a lot that we can do about how we deal with these weather swings!

With all the talk of late about pasture burning, it is fairly safe to say that once we get a sunny day with moderate winds, we will see a lot of smoke in the air through the Flint Hills. Good soaking rains like we've seen first of all insure that we are going to have good soil moisture to encourage grass to grow. But the rains also make the thatch layer wetter and the crowns of the grass plant become more resilient thereby making it easier and safer to burn off the top growth without burning into the crowns of the plants. It also makes all grassy areas less prone to wildfires!

If you've been out and about you have seen that there is water standing in a lot of crop fields. It's going to take quite a few days to get rid of the standing water and then to get the soil dry enough to be ready to start planting our first crop of the spring planting season, corn. Care must be taken to not move equipment on still damp ground even if you can do so without making ruts as compaction is a far worse threat on damp soils than are ruts! Wheat is growing rapidly now and leaf diseases will be moving in from the south so we will need to be on the lookout for stripe and leaf rust. Stripe rust had been absent through much of the southern Great Plains but was suddenly found several days ago in Kansas. Stripe rust is favored by cooler weather, leaf rust by warmer weather.

Gardens are at the same risk as crop fields of being worked too wet. If you work wet soil you will have clods. These clods will haunt you all the rest of the season as they will be hard to break down. Simply be patient and don't try to work soil when it is too wet. You will know it's too wet very quickly when you try to work it! But a quick test is to dig up some soil with a shovel, and squeeze it into a ball. If you start to get free moisture coming out of it, or it makes a ball that doesn't start to fall apart in 15 to 30 seconds, it is too wet!

As for lawns, be very careful. I've walked across several lawns in recent days that were very soft and spongy. In some of these you could hear water squishing out of the soil and turf as you walked. Compaction can be an issue with lawns as well as crop fields. Running heavy riding lawn mowers across wet soils can cause compaction that will come back to haunt you in drier months ahead. Wet turf is also fragile turf. If you are making divots when you turn your lawn mower around your soil is too wet, you are driving your lawn mower too fast and/or you are trying to turn too quickly. Whatever the cause, stop it! If you feel you must mow the lawn slow down, turn more carefully or simply use a walk behind lawn mower!

On the plus side, if you are a morel hunter, you need to be getting out into the woods! This much rain and now warm temperatures should have morels jumping out of the ground. The long run is that we can't control the rain. We take it when we get it and then hope that it is a timely rain. But when rain comes in excess, we just have to not complain, but adjust what we are doing and wait for drier weather to come!