

State and Federal Agencies offer Help During Drought

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SAN ANGELO - As the growing season progresses, hot, dry conditions prevail over much of Texas causing crops, pastures and rangeland to wither, according to a Texas AgriLife Extension Service expert.

“We’re actually experiencing quite a reversal in rainfall patterns in some areas with some rain falling on the normally dry western parts of the state while the traditionally wetter eastern portions are suffering severe drought conditions and prolonged 100-degree heat,” said Dr. Travis Miller, AgriLife Extension agronomy leader at College Station. “More than 70 percent of the state is in one stage or the other of drought.”

Texas Agriculture Commissioner Todd Staples said current dry conditions are adding more headaches to the state’s already overburdened agricultural producers.

“Texas farmers and ranchers are some of the most resilient people I have ever known,” Staples said. “Our producers have been hit hard with a triple threat starting with Hurricane Ike, then with our nation’s current economic calamity, and now one of the worst droughts our state has seen in years.

“We hope God will bless us with moisture to relieve some of the pressure facing our producers,” he said. “While we wait, state and federal agencies are working together to offer assistance and I urge producers to take advantage of these critical resources.”

Those sources include:

- The Agricultural Drought Task Force Web site, <http://agrilife.tamu.edu/drought/> provides a clearing house of drought-related information from a number of state and federal agencies. The site is divided into two distinct areas. The ‘Resources on Drought’ section provides static and changing information on drought ranging from stream-flow data and weather information to links provided by the participating agencies. The ‘News Updates/Situational Reports’ section features the latest items submitted by the participating agencies.

- Texas Department of Agriculture's Hay Hotline at 1-877-429-1998 connects ranchers with hay suppliers. The resource is meant to connect those with extra hay to sell or pasture to lease with those needing it. The agency's 'Disaster Resource Information Packet' is also available and provides pertinent contact information for state, federal and private agricultural disaster assistance programs. See www.TexasAgriculture.gov for more information on both Texas Department of Agriculture resources.

- U.S. Department of Agriculture's Farm Service Agency provides low-interest (3.75 percent interest on July 9, 2009) emergency loans to help eligible producers recover from natural disasters. Loans can cover restoring or replacing essential property; essential family living expenses; production costs associated with the disaster year; reorganizing the farming operation and refinance of certain debts. Interested producers should contact the office that serves the county in which their operation is located for options available in their specific location. For statewide assistance contact Brenda Carlson, public affairs specialist, U.S. Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency at 979-680-5213, brenda.carlson@tx.usda.gov .

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