

Another Good Year

As Cache Valley nights get colder and as the final crops are harvested, local agriculturists are slowing down a bit to assess the goodness of the season. In most cases our hay barns are full, silage bunkers are overflowing, grain bins are bulging and livestock numbers are growing. Some of us have a habit of complaining, but in reality we have been blessed beyond measure. Cache Valley is a wonderful place to live! We are like the watered garden of Utah.

A July report from Randy Julander, Snow Survey Supervisor with USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service, described how tenuous conditions were across the State. Julander wrote; "There is good news and bad news on the water front here in Utah. The bad news is that we are at the bottom in terms of soil moisture, precipitation and streamflow. The good news is that it can't get worse cause when you are at the bottom, it's pretty tuff to get lower than nothing." Randy went on to write of 80 straight days without measurable precipitation.....and the number of days expanded significantly. "Combine that lack of precipitation with sizzling temperatures, add blistering winds and you can suck every drop of moisture straight out of the ground leaving only dead grass and burnt sagebrush."

Cache County growers have had to be careful and efficient this summer with the use of limited irrigation water, but we did have water. Many property owners have experienced difficulty keeping lawns, landscapes and gardens watered. Fortunately, however, we began the year with reservoir storage at high levels. Those levels dropped quickly, but in most cases we have enjoyed a wonderful season with an abundant harvest. Again, Cache Valley is a beautiful place to live!

Many parts of our nation have not been so fortunate. An AP story published last week outlines the seriousness of the drought in Midwestern farming states. Identified as the worst drought in decades, corn and soybean yields have been marginal at best. As unrelenting dryness continues, rotational crops like winter wheat are not emerging. Many growers are concerned for the very survival of their winter wheat crop, and some have not demonstrated sufficient faith to even plan a new crop. Overall drought conditions in the lower 48 states rank a high percentage of the total land area in categories of extreme or exceptional drought, the two worst classifications possible.

On a national level, two years of drought has dramatically impacted the cattle industry. In addition to devastated pasture and range conditions, the marginal production of cultivated crops has caused surging costs for feedstuffs. Evidence of a dwindling beef cowherd and the forecast of a shrinking dairy herd are forcing food costs higher for consumers. As we begin the new calendar year, the total inventory of all cattle and calves in the U.S. will be smaller than it has been for many years. Without a significant change in the weather, these conditions will only become more troublesome.

The Board of Directors representing Western Ag Credit, largest agricultural lender in the state, delivered patronage payments to their customers early in the month. A letter accompanying the check outlined rationale for the early payment. "As you are aware, much of our area is experiencing a severe drought, some areas have experienced wildfires with the loss of rangeland, and high feed costs are negatively impacting several producers. To help relieve the hardship faced by many of you, your Board of Directors

decided to accelerate payment of a portion of the estimated 2012 patronage dividend, which would normally be paid next February.” Some may consider this to be minor action, but it equates to a significant decrease in the average interest rate paid, and most agricultural loans are quite sizeable.

Mother Nature has a way of keeping things interesting. Last year came snow, rain and floods. This year has been abnormally hot and dry. Thankfully, we started this growing season with lots of storage in reservoirs throughout our State, but our reserves are virtually depleted now. As optimists, we look forward in anticipation of significant amounts of rain and snow in the months ahead. Men can seed a few clouds to entice storms, but we are all totally dependent on the blessings of heaven when looking for precious moisture. I, for one, am grateful we have enjoyed such a productive year, but I will be doing a lot more praying for moisture. I invite you to join with prayers of your own.