

## 2015 Agriculture in Review

It is common for the majority of us spend valuable time at the end of the year assessing accomplishments, reviewing challenges, counting blessings and measuring progress toward goals. That may come as a result of submitting required annual reports to our respective supervisors, or perhaps it comes as a natural outgrowth of voluntary activities such as writing the annual family Christmas letter. Regardless of the motivation, a year end review is a worthwhile activity.

Cache County agriculturists have enjoyed one of the best years any of us can ever remember. We were able to plant crops early in the season and a killing frost did not come until late in the year. Grain bins are bulging and hay barns and corn silage bunkers are full and overflowing. Several valley farmers harvested five cuttings of alfalfa hay this season when three is typical. Livestock weaning weights have been heavier than usual because of productive pastures and rangelands. Our food pantries are also full to bursting and as a people we have an abundance of temporal blessings. Cache Valley continues to be beautiful and peaceful. Only weeks ago we were harvesting tomatoes from our gardens and the flowers in our flower beds bloomed in showy colors until mid November.

That series of miracles is humbling when we pause to remember our concern last winter and spring. Because of a rather mild winter we had inadequate snow pack in the mountains and limited moisture from infrequent storms. Our “water year” begins October 1, and monthly precipitation during the first six months of our water year was only 57 percent of normal. Assessments in February convinced us that our summer irrigation water would be gone by mid July. There was also concern our artesian wells would stop flowing. As such, many in the valley joined in a special fast the first Sunday in March. We anticipated an immediate response because of a similar petition one year earlier and expected an abundance of snow in the mountains, but that did not happen. We received very little moisture in March (only 47 percent of normal) and not much more in April. The dry, mild weather permitted us to plant our crops about three to four weeks earlier than normal, including corn that is normally not planted until mid-May. After the crops were planted the rains came, again and again. We received 5.29 inches of rain in May (221 percent of normal) and another 5.44 inches in June, July, August and September (122 percent of normal). As such, our gardens and field crops are among the best we can ever remember. Our artesian wells continue to flow well and rivers and streams have been more than adequate in delivering irrigation water to our crops. Dryland farmers have also enjoyed impressive yields. The whole season is a miracle.

Commodity prices have been lower this year than in 2014, but we’ve still had a great year. A booming agriculture benefits everyone, regardless of our occupations. Not only do we enjoy a safe, diverse and abundant supply of food, but our entire economy is stimulated by new wealth that comes again and again from crops and animals. Recent Utah statistics show that Cache County agriculturists produced more than \$184 million in direct farm sales last year. Until we break our habit of enjoying good food and other blessings that come from a strong economy, we will all want to be sure our agricultural enterprises are thriving.