

AgriLife NEWS

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Texas crop, weather

Corn planting in eastern half of state 'well behind the eight ball'

By: **Robert Burns**, 903-834-6191



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COLLEGE STATION - - Extraordinary cool and wet weather continued to bog down all field work and delay corn planting in most of the state, according to a [Texas AgriLife Extension Service](#) statewide agronomist.

"February weather was somewhat amazing," said [Dr. Travis Miller](#), AgriLife Extension specialist and associate department head of the Texas A&M University soil and crop sciences department.

Miller said that according to Texas A&M climatologists, mean temperatures throughout Texas averaged about 8 degrees below normal for February. Precipitation ranged from 80 percent to 346 percent of normal, but averaged about 150 percent of normal.

"That on top of a very wet winter puts us well behind the eight-ball, both in soil temperatures and, of course, in fields being too wet to get into," Miller said. "There's a spot or two out there where they've planted, but it's just that, spotty."

The optimal time to start planting corn in South and Central Texas regions is about the third or

fourth week of February, with planting continuing into mid to late March, he said.

"I'm fairly comfortable say here in Central Texas as late as March 15 or so, but after that the risk in yield decline is pretty precipitous because we get into hot temperatures during pollination and grain-filling time. Corn doesn't tolerate high temperatures very well," he said.

In 2009, Texas farmers planted 1.95 million acres, down a little bit from 2008. About 60 percent of that acreage is typically in eastern side of the state on non-irrigated cropland. About 40 percent is irrigated corn grown on the High Plains, according to Miller.

"It's all that eastern side of the state that's running late. They haven't hit normal planting dates in the High Plains yet," he said.

Miller said he's been hearing from seed salesmen that people are beginning to trade corn seed in for sorghum.

"It would be hard to put an exact number on this, but a lot of people in South Texas are feeling real nervous about planting this late, and we're going to see a transition from planting corn to sorghum," he said.

The following summaries were compiled by AgriLife Extension district reporters:

CENTRAL: Where weather permitted, producers began top-dressing fields. Wet fields were still an issue in most areas. Winter pastures showed improvement with the warmer temperatures and sunshine. Further weather conducive to drying out fields was needed. Livestock were in fair to good condition.

COASTAL BEND: There was very little rainfall received and below-normal temperatures. Field activities included field preparations for planting and some actual planting. Most areas will need a week or two of drying out before field work can be done. Due to later-than-normal corn planting, many growers will fertilize after planting. Pastures were slow to grow and green up due to abnormally cool nights. Livestock producers continued to feed supplemental forage and protein.

EAST: Parts of the region received as much as 1.5 inches rain, followed by warmer, sunny weather. Winter forages looked better, but AgriLife Extension personnel deemed that the improvement might be too late in the season to produce much forage. Producers struggled to stretch limited hay supplies. Some were already out of hay. Livestock showed the effects of limited forage and hay. Incidents with disease on newborn calves increased. Feral hog activity increased as wet weather drove them out of the river bottoms.

FAR WEST: As much as 1 inch of rain fell in parts of the region. Brewster County reported winds as high as 90 mph. Fall-planted onions were at fourth-leaf stage. Farmers started entering fields to apply herbicides in preparation for planting. Pecan trees were being hedged. Soil was chiseled to break up compaction. Alfalfa came out of dormancy and began growing. Alfalfa farmers were selling last year's production and dealing with greenbug aphids. Perennial grasses also were emerging from dormancy. Ranchers expected rangeland to improve early due to received moisture. Loco weed was popping up in large quantities due to winter precipitation.

NORTH: Soil moisture ranged from adequate to surplus, and the region saw a little sunshine and warmer temperatures. However, even with the milder and drier conditions, most crop fields were still very wet, and only a few farmers have been able to prepare for corn planting. The drier weather was expected to improve grazing somewhat. The sunshine was also good for small grains, but wheat was way behind and didn't look very good. Much of the problem with wheat was it needed to be fertilized, but producers were unable to get in the fields to do so. Even with a few days of sunshine, it was still too sloppy to get hay out to cattle. More rain came on May 8. Producers said the ground was "like soup" where they had to go through gates or around hay lots. More hay has been fed than in a normal year because of the extremely wet weather, and producers were running out. With supplies running short, many producers were trying to locate some hay to finish out the feeding season. Livestock seemed to be in good condition. Feral hogs continued to be a problem in some areas. In spite of everything, peach trees appeared to be in good condition. Rangeland and pastures were in poor to fair condition.

PANHANDLE: Except the far northeast corner of the region, soil-moisture levels were good. A slow snow melt during the past month resulted in deep penetration of moisture, which will be a good for spring crops. Warmer days helped wheat start to grow again. Producers were still trying to get into fields to prepare for upcoming planting of spring crops, but because of wet conditions, most were only able to speculate on what crops to plant. Cattle were in fair condition with some improvement as feedlots started to dry out and wheat fields became grazable again. Producers continued to provide supplemental feed to cattle on rangeland.

ROLLING PLAINS: Daytime temperatures began to warm to the 60s. Farmers were trying to prepare fields and put out fertilizer for this year's crop, but some areas were still too wet to plow. However, high soil moisture levels were encouraging for spring crops. Wheat looked good and was expected to really take off as soon as warmer, sunnier weather arrived. Pastures were in good condition, and as a result cattle were in good condition too. In response, producers reduced supplemental feeding and moved cattle to winter wheat fields.

SOUTH: Soil moisture was adequate except for Kleberg and Kenedy counties, where it was 80 percent surplus, and Zavala County, where it was 100 percent short. Mild temperatures and no rainfall in the northern part of the region let farmers either begin preparing fields for planting or to

plant crops, including some corn. Row-crop farmers in the eastern part of the region were able to plant crops in better-drained areas. Cooler-than-normal soil temperatures in the western part of the region delayed crop growth. Also in that area, growers had to resume irrigating due to dry conditions. Dryland wheat, oats and sorghum crops needed rain. The harvesting of spinach and cabbage continued. Onions were doing well. In the southern part of the region, growers were steadily planting. Onions were doing well there too. The harvesting of sugarcane, vegetables and citrus continued. Rangeland and pastures were recovering with light stocking. Producers lowered supplemental feeding of livestock.

SOUTH PLAINS: From 0.5 inch to 1 inch of rain fell. Temperatures remained mild. Soil-moisture levels were adequate. Many producers were behind on field work because of wet conditions but were expecting a good crop year. Winter wheat was in fair to good condition and continued to mature. Pastures and rangeland were in fair to good condition and were expected to improve with warmer weather. Livestock were in good condition as producers supplied supplemental feed on cold, wet days.

SOUTHEAST: Temperatures in the 30s hindered pasture and rangeland green-up. Warm-season grasses were mostly dormant. A little sunshine late in the reporting period promoted some winter-annual grass growth. Clovers showed more growth than ryegrass. Moisture levels were still adequate. Less than 1 inch of rain was received by most of the region. Land preparation for spring planting continued to be delayed due to wet conditions in most of the region. Rangeland conditions remained favorable.

SOUTHWEST: February rainfall was close to twice the long-term rate, further improving the agricultural outlook for the region. The extra rains will minimize irrigation costs. Spinach, cabbage, potatoes, lettuce, wheat and oats made excellent progress. Sorghum planting gained momentum. The harvesting of spinach, cabbage, broccoli and carrots was ongoing. Ranchers continued to concentrate on calving, lambing and kidding.

WEST CENTRAL: Rain and cool weather changed to warmer days with cool nights later in the reporting period. Soil-moisture levels remained very good. Farmers in most areas could not get into fields because of wet conditions. The potential for above-average wheat yields looked good. Rangeland and pastures began to green up. Stock water tank levels were very good. Livestock producers continued supplemental feeding. Livestock remained in fair to good condition.

AgriLife Communications

1501 Texas Avenue South | 2112 TAMU | College Station, TX 77843 | [Map](#)

Phone: (979) 845-2211 | Fax: (979) 845-2414 | Email: AgriLifeWeb@tamu.edu

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