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Crops Finally Receive Moisture

KSU Crop Systems Professor says Soil Needs More to Make a Difference

A much-needed round of precipitation came to Kansas last month, just in time to help prepare the soil for spring planting season.

"The back-to-back snowstorms meant extra work for those with livestock but whether you produce grain, cattle or both, our growers were happy to see some moisture on our fields and pastures." according to Kansas Corn Commission spokesperson Sue Schulte.

A range of four to 20-inches of snow and some rain fell across the majority of the state beginning on Feb. 20 and again on Feb. 25-26. The most snow reported on Feb. 21 was 18-inches of snow in western Kingman County while Pratt, Kan, saw nearly 20-inches of snow total in a five-day period.

A rare thundersnow storm dumped several inches of snow on Wichita just before dawn on Feb. 21 and as the storm pulled out of the area by evening, the total was 14.2 inches. Only the storm of Jan. 17-18, 1962, delivered more snow in south central Kansas, totaling 15 inches.

Kansas State University Associate Professor in cropping systems Kraig Roozeboom says the winter months tend to be low for rainfall and precipitation so any moisture during this season is helpful. Roozeboom has conducted research and extension projects for the Kansas Corn Commission for several years.

The problem, he said, still exists that Kansas is in a severe drought situation, one that will require many more rainfalls to eliminate the moisture deficit.

"When you look at subsoil moisture it is all short or very short," Roozeboom said. "Snow fall is great in that it is has the potential for soaking in and replenishing soil moisture compared to heavy rainfall which is more likely to runoff. The downside with snow is that a lot of it is blown and it may not have even distribution across the landscape."

Roozeboom said another issue is that crops rely on stored soil moisture. During the upcoming planting season, typically in April, and the summer growing season, Kansas needs enough rain to support crop yields in all parts of the state.

"We are still lagging behind in that regard," he said. "A matter of several inches of rainfall over time will be necessary to alleviate that situation."

Replenishing subsoil moisture is the goal, Roozeboom said, and Kansas is not out of the woods yet even with record snowfall totals. He adds farmers should continue to practice tillage methods that will retain moisture for crop growth and manage weed populations.

"Winter annuals can come in and early emerging spring weeds can use up moisture if we don't control them," he said. "It's another year where moisture will trump other yield-limiting factors. Managing inputs like weeds and fertilizers and disease control are all still important."