

FORAGE

Drought remains a problem for much of Oklahoma

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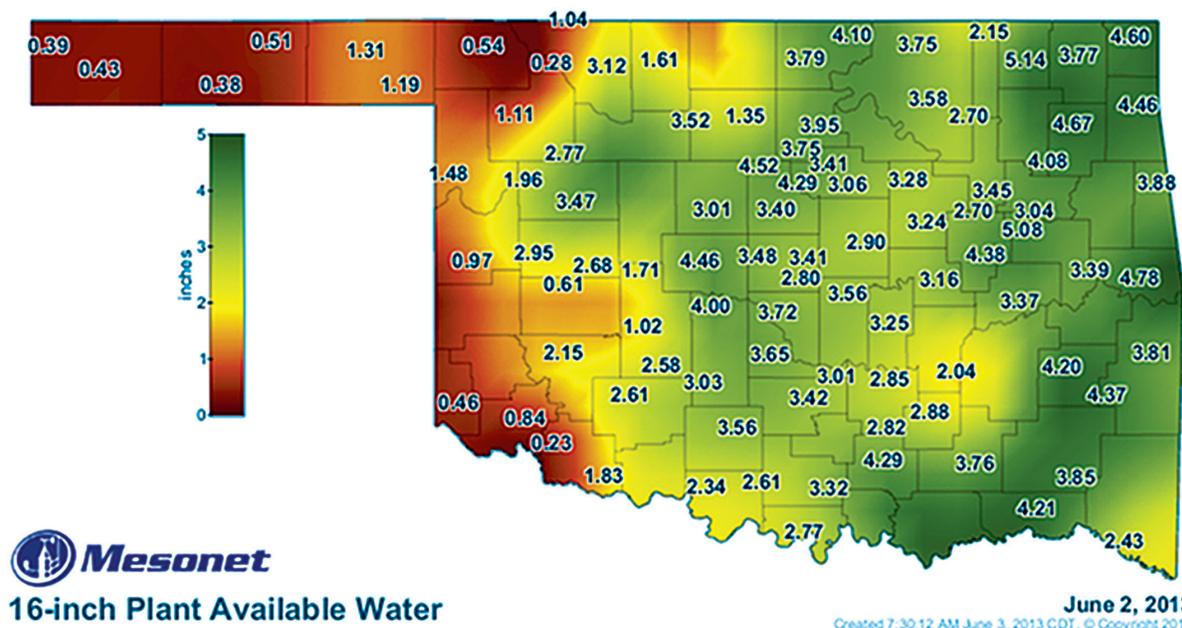


Drought is a normal occurrence. We all realize this, but a large portion of the Southwest has endured a devastating dry spell since 2011 – almost three years. The dry conditions have been especially damaging between April and June, the most crucial time for growing warm-season forage. The region needs some relief, and soon, as many producers are tired of fighting the good fight.

June 1, a critical date when we evaluate forage conditions for the upcoming summer, has come and gone for 2013. Many producers in southern Oklahoma and elsewhere were forced to sell wheat pasture cattle much sooner than planned due to limited rainfall and abnormally cool temperatures. In addition, many fall-born calves were weaned early and sold or put on feed because there wasn't enough forage to retain them. Much of Oklahoma did receive some welcome rain in late May. Relatively speaking, the eastern half of the state

looks pretty good, while the western third of the state is still suffering from both short- and long-term drought.

Combined rainfall for the months of May and June averages about 10 inches in southern Oklahoma. When it doesn't rain during this period, the effectiveness of the precipitation we receive for the remainder of the summer is greatly reduced. Dry soils lead to hotter temperatures that lead to increased evapotranspiration that leads to ... well, you get the picture. Many producers need to once again critically evaluate their current for- ▶



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age situation. If you still have water, you should take the necessary steps to survive until next spring, just like many had to do in 2011 and 2012.

If soils are dry in June, it often takes a hurricane to give us enough moisture to grow grass in July and August. So, once again, if May and June rains were insufficient in your area, consider early weaning, moving cows off the place or procuring hay. To assist you

in predicting future forage potential, a useful tool is available on the Oklahoma Mesonet website (<http://mesonet.org>). It's called "plant available water," and it records the inches of water available for plant growth at 4-, 16- and 32-inch depths.

Something new for us to consider is the United States Department of Agriculture Risk Management Agency's new annual Forage Rainfall

Index Insurance Program that insures annual crops planted for haying or grazing. It works just like the Pasture, Range and Forage Rainfall Index Insurance you should already be familiar with. The deadline to sign up for 2013 cool-season annual crops like wheat, rye, barley, triticale, oats and ryegrass is July 15. This product offers protection against decreased rainfall from September to March. ■