

DROUGHT— to be or not to be?

I was just sitting down to write this column with drought looming large in my mind when along came an unexpected snowstorm that dumped 8 inches of lovely, wet snow in the Laramie area. It fell straight down in wonderful, large flakes rather than blowing sideways at 30 mph in tiny, dry, little flakes as usual! Five inches arrived at the ranch west of Laramie.

What joy!

However, it's mid-March, and we've still a ways to go until the story is told for this spring's precipitation.

I don't know if you've noticed, but whenever I write about the weather in this column, conditions invariably change after the magazine is at the printer. Therefore, I'm hoping that pattern will repeat itself as I write about drought, and we'll soon be blessed with lots more wet snow.

With last year's conditions fresh in our minds, we are wondering what this year will bring and if drought is here to stay awhile; the scarcity and prices of harvested hay and pasture forage being the main worry for those with livestock. Drought affects forage supplies whether you live on non-irrigated land and you are dependent upon local precipitation or if you irrigate and your water supply is dependent upon mountain snowpack.

What will the year bring?

For our state, the critical time for precipitation on non-irrigated lands is March-May, depending upon elevation. If you don't receive enough wet snow or rain during that time period, the likelihood of poor forage supplies increases. Keeping a close eye on conditions in early spring can help you make plans for the year. If feeding livestock is a concern, reading the article **"A little observation will help predict this year's forage needs"** may be time well spent. If more interested in the availability of irrigation water and you are dependent upon snowpack or reservoir reserves, then attention invested in tracking those supplies will be important. March and April are also key months for snowpack in many areas of the state. Precipitation received in the mountains then can make or break the portion of our water supply dependent upon snow melt.

Many folks across the state are putting up high tunnels or other protective structures to lengthen our growing seasons and take some of the variability out of our somewhat erratic temperature fluctuations. If one of these folks, you may discover insect control is the biggest challenge in growing plants in high tunnels. If so, this issue's article **"Insect control in high tunnels"** provides information to help you avoid insect problems or detect and control these issues early before they get out of hand.

As usual, this issue contains a wonderful variety of articles full of great information: on growing grapes, using herbicides wisely and effectively, the economics of owning a horse, elm tree issues, items to consider if planning to lease land for grazing or vice versa, and much more!

Wishing you a happy and wet (within reason) spring!



Jennifer Thompson