

## Other Viewpoints

# Wheat woes point to ravaged crop

Too much of this year's wheat will be left to wither away and die.

Sadly, signs point to a wheat crop ravaged by drought and spring freeze damage not yielding much in the way of positive results in the area.

Wheat production in southwest and west-central Kansas was expected to be at about half of last year's crop, with production estimates of 22.5 million to 27 million bushels.

On June 22, wheat harvested near Scott City came in at about 25 bushels per acre. But that particular field of summer-fallow wheat likely turned out a better yield than continuous wheat fields in the area would, according to representatives of the Kansas Wheat Commission.

As harvesters head into more fields in southwest Kansas, the negative forecast doesn't bode well for a region all too familiar with the impact of a poor wheat harvest. Entire communities feel the pressure when wheat farmers deal with weather-related problems.

As always, dryness tops the list of offenders, and has been more of a concern than usual in an area that's received just more than a third of the normal amount of precipitation for the year. With recent rainfall, Garden City still was at about 3.7 inches of precipitation Tuesday, compared to the normal year-to-date amount of more than 9 inches.

The sad picture will see a number of area dryland fields not cut because insignificant yields wouldn't pay off.

As combines roll through fields of wheat deemed worthy of harvest, we're left to see how much damage the overall crop sustained.

Such a situation is nothing new for Kansas wheat farmers, who know all too well the nagging uncertainty of their work — and that they also must do their best to salvage what they can to help feed the world.

As they go about their business, the hope is higher grain prices for those able to harvest a crop at least counter some production losses.

In the midst of a tough stretch of farming, even small victories would help boost spirits on the farm and in rural Kansas communities with a huge stake in every harvest.

— The Garden City Telegram, via the Associated Press

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OOOO... AHHH...



# Firefighting, smoke a constant presence

Since arriving in Colorado last Wednesday evening, we've eaten a lot of smoke, but the most danger we've faced has been on the road coming out here from Kansas.

Neither our house nor the town of Creede is threatened. Both are separated from the fire by large expanses of open space, and fire fighters should be able to keep the flames away from them as they have from homes and businesses both up river and down — so far.

After three weeks, the West Fork Complex of fires has grown from a few trees hit by lightning near Pagosa Springs, Colo., to three fires in more than 94,000 acres of spruce forest, most of which had been devastated by a beetle epidemic over the last 10 years. The fire, especially when driven by the wind, has been explosive at times in standing dead, tinder-dry trees, keeping firefighters out on the fringes.

The crew has grown to more than 1,500 firefighters of all stripes, from professional government crews and contract fire fighters, many of them volunteer firemen the rest of the time, to local volunteers. At least 30 of the 20-man government fire crews are on the line, along with professional and volunteer fire companies from all over Colorado. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management and National Park Service crews have come from all over the west.

Resources continue to pour in, and some crews are sent home as others arrive. The team now includes 20 helicopters and two fixed-wing tankers. Two of the helicopters are based



**Steve Haynes**

• Along the Sappa

at the airport near our home, and we see a lot of them when they run back here for fuel.

The fire crews have around 80 engines of all kinds, from city pumpers to specialized wild-fire rigs, and smaller brush trucks and forest rigs of many types. The count topped out at 102 a couple of days ago. "Hotshot" crews arrive in special Forest Service and Land Management trucks which can carry eight to nine men and women and their gear.

Fire rigs of all kinds run up and down the highways. In the evening, most of the rigs go home to one of at least five camps established to fight the fire, but a night shift goes out to keep an eye on things. Helicopters buzz back and forth, buckets of water or fire retardant mixture slung underneath.

Firefighters are spending much of their time clearing trees and brush around houses and buildings near the blaze and setting up portable drop tanks filled with water in case the fire comes down. Others are building dozer and land lines at critical points, protecting the town of South Fork down river and the Rio Grande Reservoir up river.

Most evacuations have been lifted as protection work is completed and the wind has kept the fire at bay, but especially to the west, the blaze remains out of control. After more than three weeks, containment is estimated at just 4 percent. Huge, angry plumes of smoke rose from the wilderness on Monday.

And while the towns are safe for now and the highways opened up this weekend, the area's economy may not recover for years. Most businesses here have to make a year's income in two or three months, and the Fourth of July is the biggest week of the year.

Tourists are starting to move back into RV parks and some resorts, while others remain closed. The streets are mostly deserted and the noted Creede Repertory Theater is half full, if that.

Even if the blaze stays away from houses and stores — not one has been lost so far — the smoke is nearly unbearable some days, while others, it clears out as the wind shifts. That can happen two or three times a day, and the same wind can fan the fire up on the mountain.

Meantime, tourists are staying away in droves, and the season promises to be a poor one no matter what happens from here on out. Plus, many square miles of prime forest have been lost. It's not a pretty picture, any way you look at it.

Steve Haynes is president of Nor'West Newspapers. When he has the time, he'd rather be reading a good book or casting a fly.

# In 'dog days' of summer, bring on rain

In case you hadn't noticed, much of the state may already be mired in the "dog days" of summer. You might be thinking, it's too early for such hot temperatures, but think again.

Although it may be nothing to brag about, Kansans and the ancient Romans have a common appreciation (maybe aversion is a better word) to hot summer days.

While some Kansans are fortunate to work, and most of us live in air-conditioned homes, the Romans were forced to retreat to the seaside, a shady tree or a dip at the local bathhouse to keep cool.

So where did the term "dog days" actually come from?

Ancient Romans noted that the brightest star in the night sky — Sirius — appeared each year during hot, sultry weather. Sirius, which originates from the Greek word for "scorcher," became known as the Dog Star. Consequently, the hot, steamy weather it brought was called, "dog days."

Believing the star caused the miserable weather, ancient Romans sacrificed brown dogs to appease the rage of Sirius.

Instead of mythology, astrology or old wives' tales, we have meteorology to help us define what's going on with our weather. Based on the predictability of today's weather — and it has improved dramatically — some people might argue we should revert to the techniques used by the early Romans.

Somehow, I seem to have started this column on the wrong foot. Maybe it's the heat or lack of moisture. Anyway, let me begin again.

What does the rest of the summer and fall weather in Kansas look like?

In order to answer this question I turned to George Phillips with the National Weather Service in Topeka. Phillips has studied the



**John Schlageck**

• Insights

Kansas Farm Bureau

weather in Kansas for many years.

Because of a large ridge of high pressure setting up above the Sunflower State, July and August temperatures will probably experience higher than normal temperatures. This could mean somewhere in the high 80s or mid 90s and even triple digit temperatures, Phillips says. This doesn't bode well for western Kansans.

Moisture amounts could be above or below "normal," whatever that is in today's climate. It's difficult to predict moisture amounts during the summer months in Kansas. There just aren't enough signals to rely on.

Thunderstorms will continue to be spotty with the potential for some heavy rains with these isolated storms, Phillips says.

"An isolated, small spot on the Kansas map may receive an inch or two while just a mile or less away may only pick up a trace of moisture," says the National Weather Service science operations officer.

The chance of any wide-spread rains during the rest of the summer is unlikely although not impossible, Phillips says. Instead, Kansas will experience scattered showers and if you're lucky enough to get one over your field, consider yourself fortunate — it's going to be hit and miss for the rest of the summer.

As far as the extended drought on the High Plains of Kansas, Phillips reports the western

40 percent of Kansas is in the "D-3" category of extreme drought or higher. Some parts of western Kansas, especially the southwest are in a category "D-4," considered the worst drought possible.

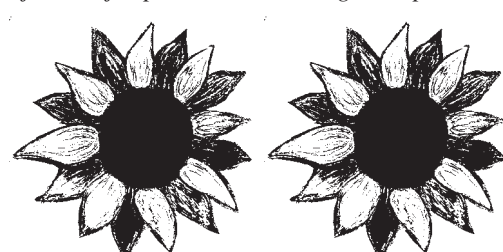
With three, going on four years of drought in some parts of Kansas, farmers are already speculating on the possibility of having enough moisture to put their next wheat crop in the ground. They'll need some rain between now and mid-September to ensure the crop germinates.

The first estimates, and at this time they are little more than a guess, indicate above normal temperatures this fall, Phillips says. Predicting moisture amounts is impossible.

With the hottest days of summer bearing down on Kansas generally in mid-July hold on to your hat because 2013 may be a real scorcher — maybe even one for the record books.

Looking forward to the remainder of the summer, what happens with temperatures and rainfall amounts is anybody's guess. Farmers and producers will keep a watchful eye. As for brown dogs in farm country — beware.

John Schlageck of the Kansas Farm Bureau is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. He grew up on a diversified farm near Seguin, and his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.



## Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley



Mallard Fillmore cartoon by Bruce Tinsley

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