

Rain, Rain, Go Away
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Oklahoma Climatological Survey
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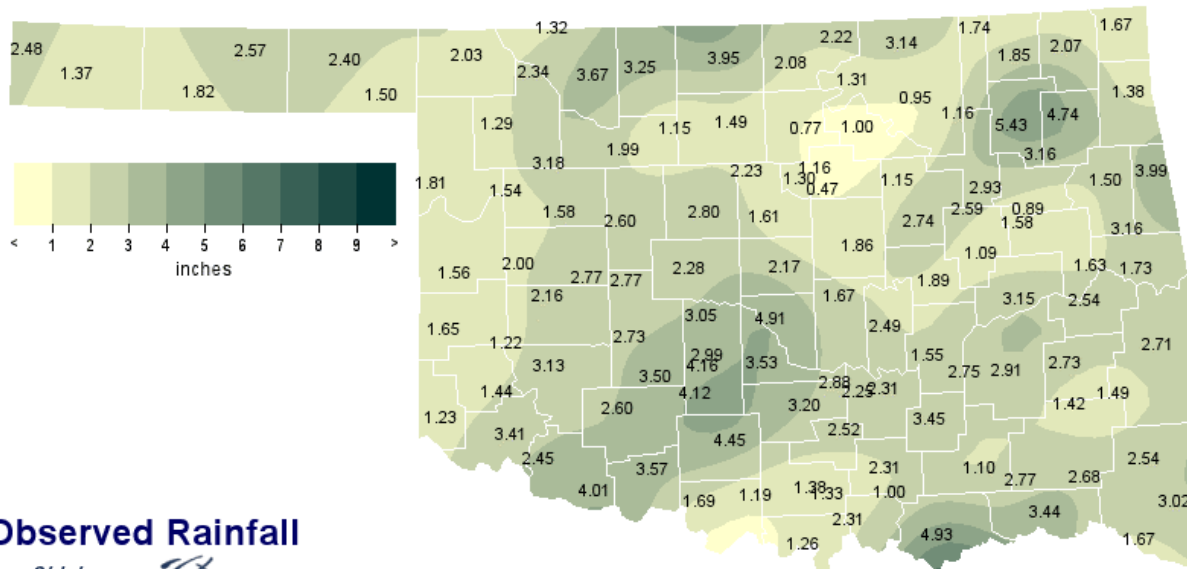
NORMAN - We always hear about farmers praying for rain, but sometimes, that just isn't the case. This year, many of Oklahoma's wheat farmers are saying "enough, already."

During the past two weeks, much of the state's wheat belt has received more than enough rain. During other times of the year, this would be welcome news. However, it poses tremendous problems in early June, when many growers are trying to harvest their crop.

Ironically, Oklahoma's abundant rainfall this season may be putting the crop at risk. More than anything, wheat farmers could use a break in the rain. Getting combines in and out of the fields is only part of the problem. Wet wheat straw is difficult to cut, and damp grain is difficult to thrash. Moreover, if the grain is harvested, elevators often charge extra fees for – or reject altogether – excessively moist grain. If the plant's seed imbibes water, test weights will drop, consequently lowering payments farmers receive at market.

According to Mark Hodges, the Executive Director of the Oklahoma Wheat Commission, the June rains have had "a significant impact" on this year's crop. Despite an early start near the Red River in mid-May, only about 25% of the state's crop has been harvested, and test weights are beginning to drop. "We've seen about a 2-5 pound per bushel loss in south and central Oklahoma test weights," Hodges said. "Our only saving grace so far has been that test weights were much higher than the long-term average when the harvest started. That gave us a little breathing room, but things still aren't as good as they could have been. We are concerned somewhat with quality loss."

So, how much rain has fallen? Rainfall totals since June 1st across the wheat belt, stretching from southwestern Oklahoma into north central parts of the state, range up to four inches. The following Oklahoma Mesonet rainfall maps illustrates why progress has slowed in the southern wheat belt:



Observed Rainfall



June 2003
Jun 1, 2003 through Jun 11, 2003

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There is a silver lining to this situation: Oklahoma's row crops and pastures are benefiting from the rain. Many locations in the eastern half of the state reduced a rainfall deficit of up to eight or more inches since last fall.

The forecast for the next week calls for conditions that are very typical during June: humid days and chances for some locally heavy rainfall. The National Weather Service indicates showers and thunderstorms possible into early next week across much of Oklahoma. "We have chances of rainfall in the forecast for the next seven days or so," said NWS forecaster Kenneth James. "As we approach each event, we'll be able to better see surface boundaries and other small-scale conditions and we can refine our forecast accordingly."

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