

Office Of Rural Community Affairs May Ease Rural Drought Concerns

The Office of Rural Community Affairs (ORCA) announced it has begun working with rural city and county officials to revise existing project contracts to address urgent drought-related water supply concerns.

Local officials are seeking relief through grants they have received from the agency's Texas Community Development Block Grant (Texas CDBG) program, which supports water and wastewater infrastructure projects in rural Texas.

Officials and agency administrators are looking to revise existing open contracts which were originally funded for the installation and/or repairs of municipal water and wastewater infrastructure to allow for water supply projects instead.

The city of Clarksville is one city that is pursuing revisions to their 2005 \$250,000 Texas CDBG program contract.

Their Texas CDBG grant was originally awarded for the replacement of old, corroded and undersized water lines and the installation of hydrants, reconstructions, road bore and related street repairs.

By January 2006, the city was experiencing severe drought conditions with the municipal supply system dangerously low, rendering the city unable to supply sufficient water to meet demand in the near future.

With the agency's determination that Clarksville's Stage 4 drought conditions posed an emergency need and imminent threat to the safety of its residents, their Texas CDBG contract

qualified for possible amendment.

The city council issued a water rationing declaration per the city's "Drought Contingency Plan," and moved quickly to submit a request to ORCA to allow the grant funds be used for a well drilling project.

To date, ORCA administrators note that four other Texas CDBG grant recipients with open contracts with the agency are in the process of amending their contracts with to address water supply concerns.

Amending an open Texas CDBG contract requires the community to meet certain criteria in keeping with federal rules and regulations set forth by the U.S. Department of Housing

and Urban Development, the source of the funds for ORCA's Texas CDBG program.

ORCA's Small Towns Environment Program (STEP), also a Texas CDBG program, offers an alternative to the contract amendment process. The STEP funds provide rural communities with needed dollars for equipment, expertise and technical assistance to address local water and wastewater issues. Local volunteers provide the "sweat equity" (labor) for the STEP projects.

"We understand the difficulties our state's small, rural community and county officials are facing in providing

water to their residents under recent conditions," noted Charles S. (Charlie) Stone, ORCA's Executive Director. "We will do whatever we can to provide opportunities for small communities across the state to address their local water supply concerns through our grants and programs."

ORCA's door is always open for your comments and suggestions regarding the agency, or rural issues in general. Contact ORCA at P.O. Box 12877, Austin, Texas 78711. Phone: 512-936-6701 Toll free: 800-544-2042 E-mail: orca@orca.state.tx.us Fax: 512-936-6776. On the web: www.orca.state.tx.us

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Agricultural Summary

High temperatures over the week had many wondering if winter was transiting into summer; skipping spring all together.

High temperatures skyrocketed into the upper 80's and 90's nearly statewide.

Wichita Falls had the distinction of being the state's hotspot with the thermometer topping out at 98 degrees.

The record breaking heat was a result of very low humidity. Severe drought conditions over the past several months left the air extremely dry and less resistant to daytime heating.

Only a few locations received rainfall. The Plains reported rain gauge readings ranging from a trace to over 1/2 inch accumulation.

Precipitation amounts of 1/4 to 1/2 inch fell over very isolated locations in North Central Texas.

Many areas that received moisture the previous week were now beginning to see the benefits.

Along with the full sun and warm temperatures, the increased rain brought some grasses out of dormancy and greened-up the countryside.

Most improvement was realized in central and eastern regions where planting of summer crops gained momentum.

The rest of the state remained extremely dry and was still in dire need of moisture.

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Thin Cows	35-42	
PACKER BULLS		
Heavyweight bulls	65-73	
Utility cutter bulls	57-64	
STEERS		
200-300 lbs	170-200	143-165
300-400 lbs	150-178	125-145
400-500 lbs	135-153	118-132
500-600 lbs	118-131	110-120
600-700 lbs	110-120	100-109
700-800 lbs	98-108	88-98
HEIFERS		
200-300 lbs	150-180	140-152
300-400 lbs	142-150	125-141
400-500 lbs	125-140	113-124
500-600 lbs	115-129	107-114
600-700 lbs	98-112	90-97
700-800 lbs	90-100	82-89
STOCKER COWS		
Good Stocker Cow/calf Pairs	850-1000	
Medium Cow/calf Pairs	675-845	
Common Cow/calf Pairs	600-670	
Good Stocker Cows & Heifers	675-850	
Medium Stocker Cows & Heifers	525-660	

Texas Crop Weather Report

increased in western areas. Supplemental feeding was still necessary in all areas but decreased in locations that saw pasture improvement.

The scarcity and expense of hay forced many cattle producers to continue herd reductions.

Burn bans were temporarily lifted in some counties, but unless a substantial soaking rain occurs in all corners of the state, fire danger remains a very serious concern.

Field Crops Report

Small Grains: Many irrigated wheat producers on the Plains were deciding whether or not to apply top dressing fertilizer to marginal fields.

Stockers continued to graze under pivots in the region. Remaining dry land wheat in western areas was nearly all grazed out.

In Central and North Central Texas, fields began to break dormancy and green-up.

In South Texas, some fields have begun to head out while others were baled for hay.

Statewide, wheat condition was rated mostly poor to very poor. Statewide, oat condition was rated mostly very poor.

Cotton: Producers on the Plains were busy listing fields and some were applying yellow fertilizer.

Many growers were still awaiting rain before beginning any field work.

Planting was ongoing in the Rio Grande Valley and was expected to begin gaining momentum on the Coastal Bend.

Corn: Planting began on the Blacklands and continued throughout all southern regions. Producers took advantage of rain that fell last weekend.

It remained to be seen if enough moisture would be available over the growing season. All areas still suffered from long-term drought. On the Plains, land preparation continued.

Sorghum: Planting continued in the Rio Grande Valley and Coastal Bend. Some earlier planted fields were emerging.

Land preparation was ongoing in other areas. Planting began on a limited basis on the Upper Coast and was expected to start in Central Texas shortly.

Fruit, Vegetable and Specialty Crop Report

In the Rio Grande Valley, harvest of grapefruit and naval oranges continued.

In the San Antonio-Winter Garden, cabbage and spinach harvest continued.

All crops remained under heavy irrigation.

In the Trans Pecos Region, good stands of winter onions were reported. Grapes were being watered for the first time this season.

In East Texas, onion planting was ongoing. Preparations continued for spring vegetables. Sweet potato growers were plowing fields.

Livestock, Pasture and Range Report

Native range and pastures were recovering and coming out of dormancy in areas that benefited from rainfall last weekend.

Any improvement would be temporary unless a lot more additional precipitation is realized. Small grain pastures were grazed to the ground in dry land areas.

Only irrigated grazing remained. Cattle body conditions continued to show signs of poor forage availability. Herd liquidation was still necessary. Spring calving and kidding were ongoing.

Shrimp producers were trying to predict market conditions before filling ponds in the Trans Pecos region. Grass fires remained an ever present danger across Texas and prevention was of primary concern.

USDA Ceases Taking New Grassland

USDA announced Farm Service Agency (FSA) and Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) offices are no longer taking applications for its Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) due to lack of funding, announced Mary Parr, County Executive Director for the Name County FSA.

Reauthorized in the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (Farm Bill), GRP is a voluntary program that provides financial and technical assistance to landowners and operators for the preservation and conservation of the nation's grasslands.

GRP enrollment permits common grazing practices, haying, mowing, or harvesting for seed production from the grassland, subject to certain restrictions.

"The Agricultural Appropriations Act of 2006 did not include additional funding for GRP," said Parr. "There is currently an existing backlog of GRP applications in every state."

To reduce delays to producers and prevent additional workload in USDA Service Centers, FSA and NRCS offices are no longer accepting new applications for GRP. States have been asked to retain all unfunded GRP applications.

Over \$78.2 million was allocated, nationally, to the program in Fiscal Year 2005, which runs from Oct. 1, 2004, through Sept. 30, 2005. Of these funds, Texas received \$8.9 million in GRP funds.

The Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service and Forest Service work together to coordinate implementation of GRP, which helps landowners restore and protect grassland, rangeland, pastureland, shrubland and certain other lands and provides assistance for rehabilitating grasslands.

Additional information on GRP is available online at: www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/GRP or at your local USDA Service Center Office.

Please contact the Colorado County FSA at (979) 732-8306, ext. 2 for additional assistance.

Soil And Water Banquet Set March 31 In Weimar

The Colorado Soil and Water Conservation District #333 will host the 57th Annual Awards Banquet on Friday, March 31 at the Veteran's Memorial Hall in Weimar.


The deadline to purchase tickets is Friday, March 17. Tickets may be purchased at the District office located at 316 Spring Street, Columbus. A fried fish meal will be served.

Winners of the Annual Coloring, Poster and Essay Contest will be recognized. Conservationist award winners include Ken and Sheila Kram - Weimar Resident Conservationist, Barbara Ardis - Eagle Lake - Conservation Teacher and Alvina Poenitzsch (Shaw's Bend) and Beverly Krennek (Garwood) - Conservation Home-maker.

For more information, call the District office at 979-732-9565.

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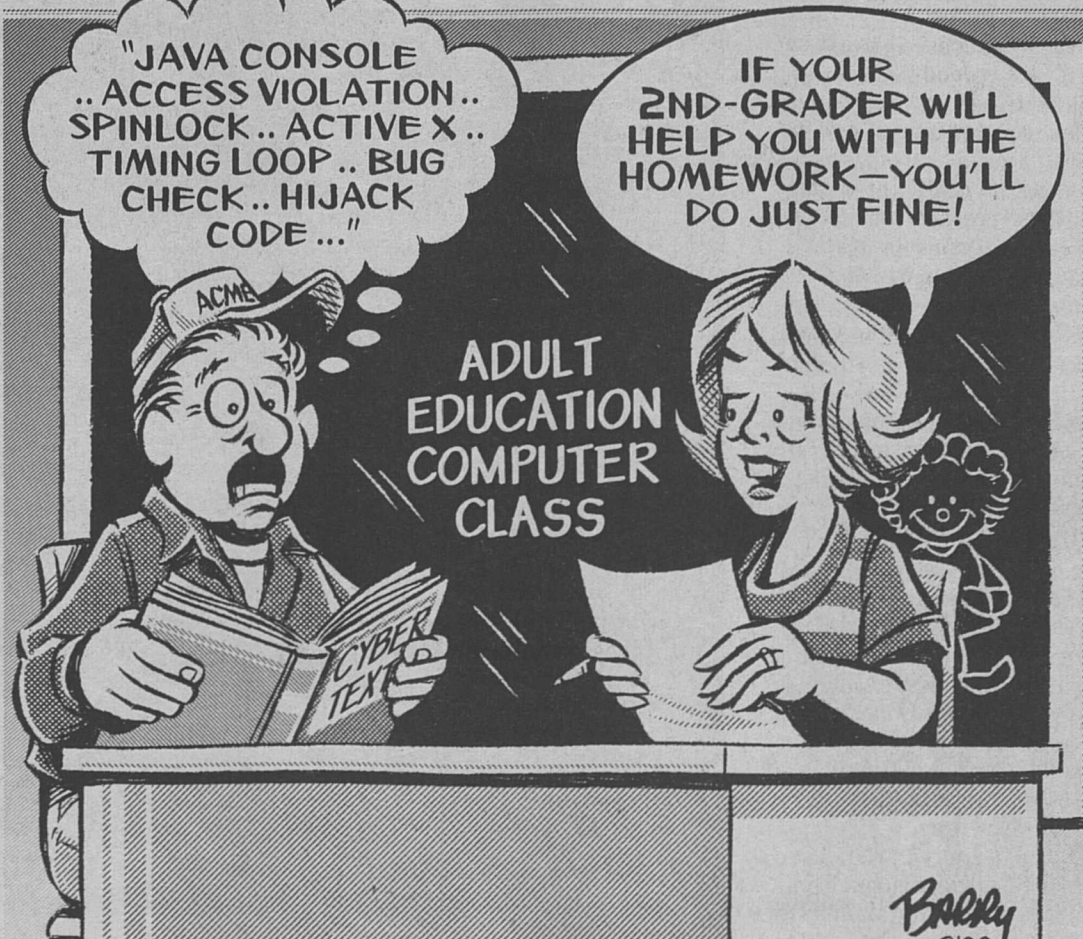


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