

Soaking rain hampers farming along north Oregon coast

By **GEORGE PLAGEN**
Capital Press

TILLAMOOK, Ore. — While parts of central and eastern Oregon remain parched by extreme drought, farms along the north coast face an entirely different set of weather-related challenges — relentless rainfall.

A nearly constant soaking in Tillamook this spring has made it difficult, if not impossible, for the area's signature dairies to work in their fields, cutting grass and planting corn that goes to feeding cows.

Instead, farmers say they may need to purchase additional hay and silage from outside the area, adding significantly to their production costs.

"Most of the locals I've talked to here say they hav-

en't seen a spring like this in a long time," said Garritt Kuipers, of Kuipers Farms LLC.

Kuipers milks 650 cows at his family's farm on Highway 101 just south of Tillamook. He came to Oregon in the summer of 2019 after previously dairying in Mt. Vernon, Wash., joining the Tillamook County Creamery Association.

Both 2020 and 2021 were fantastic springs, Kuipers remembers, with plenty of sunshine to get fieldwork done. The farm grows about 325 acres of grass and 100 acres of corn.

This year, however, has been a different story. The rain has let up for only a few days at a time, Kuipers said, shortening their window of opportunity to harvest grass silage and making fields too



George Plaven/Capital Press
From left, Armando Macias and Wym Matthews with the Oregon Department of Agriculture, and Garritt and Cory Kuipers, talk about their dairy farm near Tillamook during a recent tour.

soggy to plant corn or spread manure fertilizer.

"It's impossible to get the equipment out without getting stuck, for one," he said. "If you do get out there, you're just ruining the fields

with ruts."

According to the National Weather Service, it has been wetter than normal so far this year on the north Oregon coast. Data for Seaside, about 50 miles north of Til-

lamook, shows 41.3 inches of rain fell between January and May. That is approximately 4.5 inches more than the average dating back to 2000.

Whereas Kuipers said he would usually be on his third grass cutting of the season, the farm was only able to finish its first cutting by the third week of May.

"It was only hours after we got it off that it was raining again," he said. "It was nip and tuck the whole time."

As for corn, Kuipers said little has been planted anywhere in Tillamook. Some farmers pivoted instead to cheaper annual crops such as grass, barley or peas rather than spend the money on diesel and fertilizer to grow what, after weeks of delays, would be less corn.

That means buying supplemental feed, which Kuipers said has increased dramatically in price. Alfalfa

hay that sold for \$290 per ton last year is now more than \$400 per ton. Spot prices for corn are up 68% from a year ago.

Kuipers estimated his feed costs last year were \$5.50 per cow per day, or \$3,575 for the entire herd. This year, he expects it to be \$9 to \$10 per cow, per day. Meanwhile, the price he gets for his milk from the Tillamook dairy co-op remains the same.

Derrick Josi, of Wilsonview Dairy, tells a similar story at his farm. In addition to growing 200 acres of feed crops, he has 450 acres of pasture where by June his herd of 500 Jersey cows would normally be grazing day and night.

"It still feels like March here. It's cold and rainy," Josi said. "We put them out when it's halfway decent, but when it's rainy, they just stay in the barns."

Wet and cold spring slows Washington ag

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

Western Washington's wet and cold spring has delayed planting and slowed crops, according to farmers, who came into the season already facing rising fuel, fertilizer, labor and chemical costs.

"Every front that a farmer is fighting is against him," said Andrew Albert, owner of Andrew's Hay LLC in Arlington.

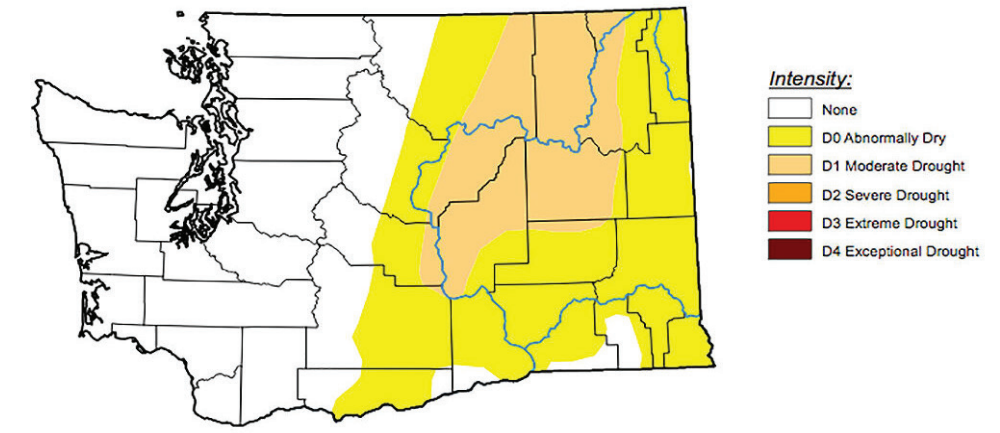
"It's been tough on the crew. When it's nice out, you try to do a whole week's worth of work in two days, which is not possible," he said.

Washington's third coldest April in 128 years of record-keeping was followed by the eighth coldest May ever, according to the National Centers for Environmental Information.

Put together, it was third-coldest and fourth-wettest April-May combination in state history. The National Weather Service predicts the state will be cooler and wetter than normal throughout June.

"The weather has been absolutely horrible," said Gary Lund, a farmer in Stanwood in northwest Washington. "Nobody can remember it being this bad, this late."

Skagit County dairy farmer Jason Vander Kooy said corn



Drought areas remaining in Washington state.

U.S. Drought Monitor

that should be waist-high is 4 inches tall. Not all fields are planted because they are too wet. Water fills tracks made by tractor tires, he said.

Plus, alfalfa has been slow to grow in the cold. Vander Kooy said he doesn't expect to get the usual five cuttings.

"It could be kind of a tough year for feed," he said. "You spend \$5.50 a gallon for fuel and \$1,000 on fertilizer and hope for a bumper crop. It's not looking like a bumper crop."

Washington stands alone in the West as nearly drought-free. Only 17% of the state remains in "moderate drought," according to the U.S. Drought Monitor. Nearly three-quarters of Oregon and Idaho are in drought.

When April began, the eastern half of Washington was in a drought. A quarter of the state was in a "severe drought."

Parts of Washington still have rain deficits built over months. The wet spring gradually overcame the long dry period, Washington State Assistant Climatologist Karin Bumbaco said.

In late May, the state retained a drought designation for five watersheds in Eastern Washington. At least two, maybe all five, will soon no longer qualify for drought status.

"What we did in May no longer matches the reality of conditions," Department of Ecology drought response coordinator Jeff Marti said.

From a water supply outlook, "things keep getting better and better," he said.

The USDA's weekly report on crops in Western Washington on Monday highlighted the drawbacks to the cool and wet weather:

Too wet to do much fieldwork, ponds in potato and vegetable seed fields, farmers planting between thunderstorms. Tomatoes, peppers and cucurbits planted outside "suffered severely."

Albert said he's waiting for four or five dry days to plant 100 acres of corn. He could try to overcome the late start by applying more fertilizer, but he said he won't gamble.

"It's not worth risking the fertilizer," he said.

Oregon drought persists, though recent rainfall reduces severity

By **MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI**
Capital Press

With rain storms relentlessly soaking the state throughout spring, Oregonians can be forgiven for assuming that drought fears have dissipated.

Many are surprised to learn that worries about water shortages have persisted despite the stubbornly soggy weather, said Ryan Andrews, a hydrologist at the Oregon Water Resources Department.

Though the season's high rainfall and low temperatures have mitigated what could have been a much worse situation, much of Oregon is still enduring a prolonged "mega-drought" that's afflicting the entire West, Andrews said.

"Though the spring precipitation was nice, it was not enough to overcome the long-term deficit," he said at the June 16 meeting of the state's Water Resources Commission, which oversees the agency.

Conditions associated with summer, such as reduced stream flows and soil moisture levels, have been delayed, Andrews said.

Irrigators and other water users must still "proceed with caution," though — particularly in areas where drought has remained severe, such as Central Ore-

gon, Andrews said.

According to a recent study, the past 22 years represent the West's worst "mega-drought" in about 1,200 years, he said. A mega-drought is an abnormally dry period that lasts more than two decades.

The multi-year drought has lingered through the seasonal intervals of wetness while being aggravated by lower-than-normal snowpacks and earlier "melt-out" in the summer, Andrews said.

Last year, OWRD got 600 reports of domestic wells going dry or yielding less water and has received 300 such complaints so far in 2022, he said. Funding is available for households with low and moderate incomes to repair or replace aging wells.

Of course, the extent and intensity of the drought would be exacerbated without this spring's ample rainfall, he said.

Stream flows unfortunately remain below-average in some areas, but statewide the outlook is more optimistic headed into summer, Andrews said.

Some irrigation reservoirs were at record-low levels at the end of last summer, but the prolonged rains have helped replenish them while reducing water demand from farmers, he said.

Agricultural groups comment on emissions proposal

By **CAROL RYAN DUMAS**
Capital Press

Several agricultural groups have filed joint comments to the Securities and Exchange Commission on its proposed rules requiring publicly traded companies to report greenhouse gas emissions up and down their value chain.

The Enhancement and Standardization of Climate-Related Disclosures for Investors would require SEC registrants to provide information about climate-related risks that are likely to have an impact on their business or financial condition.

It would require companies to report their direct emissions, emissions primarily resulting from the generation of electricity they consume and all other indirect emissions.

Those "other" indirect emissions would include emissions by the vast majority of farmers and ranchers, as they provide almost every raw product that goes into the food supply chain.

The American Farm Bureau Federation and other groups said farmers and ranchers could be forced to report personal information and business-related data, creating onerous reporting requirements.

In their comments to SEC, Farm Bureau and 10 other agricultural groups pointed out agriculture's success in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and said the proposed rule threatens that progress.

"Our organizations and our members are committed

to transparency in climate-related matters to inform our stakeholders in a manner consistent with existing practices in the agriculture industry," the groups said.

"However, without changes and clarifications, the proposed rules would be wildly burdensome and expensive if not altogether impossible for many small and mid-sized farmers to comply with ...," they said.

When farmers and ranchers can't afford the overhead required to comply, they will have no choice but to consolidate, the groups said.

Further consolidation could seriously impede the ability of local communities to fund education, social services and access to health care. The proposed rule would also harm consumers and erode the strength of the U.S. agriculture industry, they said.

The groups encouraged SEC to consider:

- Removing the "value-chain" concept;
- Removing or substantially revising the emissions disclosure requirement to include an explicit exemption for the agriculture industry;
- Removing the requirement that registrants provide disclosures pertaining to their climate-related targets and goals;
- Providing guidance with respect to the Consolidated Appropriations Act's (2022) prohibition on mandatory GHG emissions reporting for manure management systems;
- Revising the proposed rules so that disclosures of GHG emissions operate in

unison with existing federal emissions reporting programs;

- Ensuring the final rules don't include location data disclosures for GHG emis-

sions; and

- Enhancing the liability protections to registrants by making all disclosures "furnished" rather than "filed."

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