

SPRING RAIN | BAKER COUNTY

A REASON FOR OPTIMISM

Farmers and ranchers in Northeastern Oregon started the spring of 2022 with a dismal outlook, plagued by severe drought, supply chain problems and fuel prices that were beginning their rise to record highs.

But producers ended the season with ample reason for optimism.

Rarely has a single season wrought such dramatic changes on the agriculture industry, a vital economic engine for every county in the region.

The reason is simple: rain.

A significant shift in the weather pattern that started in early April continued for the next two months.

Although some areas were considerably more soggy than others, rainfall was plentiful across Northeastern Oregon.

The moisture eased the drought, especially in Umatilla and Morrow counties.

At the start of April, every part of both counties was either in moderate, severe or extreme drought, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor.

By the end of June, no part of either county was in drought status.

The benefits were nearly as widespread in Union County, where the southern half remained abnormally dry, one level below drought.

The southern half of Grant County was in the worst shape, with the drought still extreme. But even there, ranchers were reporting bountiful hay harvests and much better growing conditions than in 2021.

On the opposite side of the ledger, however, the supply chain issues remain.

Worse yet, fuel prices, which affect every aspect of farming and ranching, continue to hover near record highs. The associated hike in the costs of producing crops and livestock have largely, if not completely, offset the benefits of the benevolent weather and decent markets for commodities.

Over the following pages we'll examine the situation across Northeastern Oregon, from wheat fields of the Columbia Basin to the cattle ranches of the Blue Mountains.

— Jayson Jacoby,
Baker City Herald editor

Wet spring turns 'disaster' into a GREAT YEAR FOR GRASS



By JAYSON JACOBY
Baker City Herald

Baker County cattle rancher Bert Siddoway was bracing for what he described as a “disaster.”

Almost three months later, he could look across hay meadows and pastures and see grass growing tall and lush in the Durkee Valley about 25 miles southeast of Baker City.

“It looked horrible the first of April,” Siddoway said on June 27. “There was no grass.”

But along about the second week of April, the weather pattern didn’t so much shift as it reversed.

The stagnant high pressure ridge that had steered moisture-laden Pacific storms around Oregon gave way to a jet stream that started to drive those low pressure systems directly into the state.

Grass in a Baker Valley pasture was about as tall as this calf on July 5, 2022.
Lisa Britton/Baker City Herald

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