

# Snow: 'We have been in a La Nina cycle'

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"I usually don't get too worried about it. I feel like we're in pretty good shape."

In fact, growers are counting on more precipitation in April and May. The head gates for the Wallowa Lake Irrigation District open May 1.

Kurt Melville, a partner in Cornerstone Farms with his dad, Tim, and brother, Kevin, also is optimistic on local soil moisture.

"A lot of it depends on how frozen the ground was and how well the moisture soaked in," he said. "That differs with every field and soil type."

"Most of our soils around here have soil-holding capacity of about 2 inches per foot," Kurt said.

But that varies throughout the county.

"Every single soil's different depending how much clay, sand, rock there is," he said.

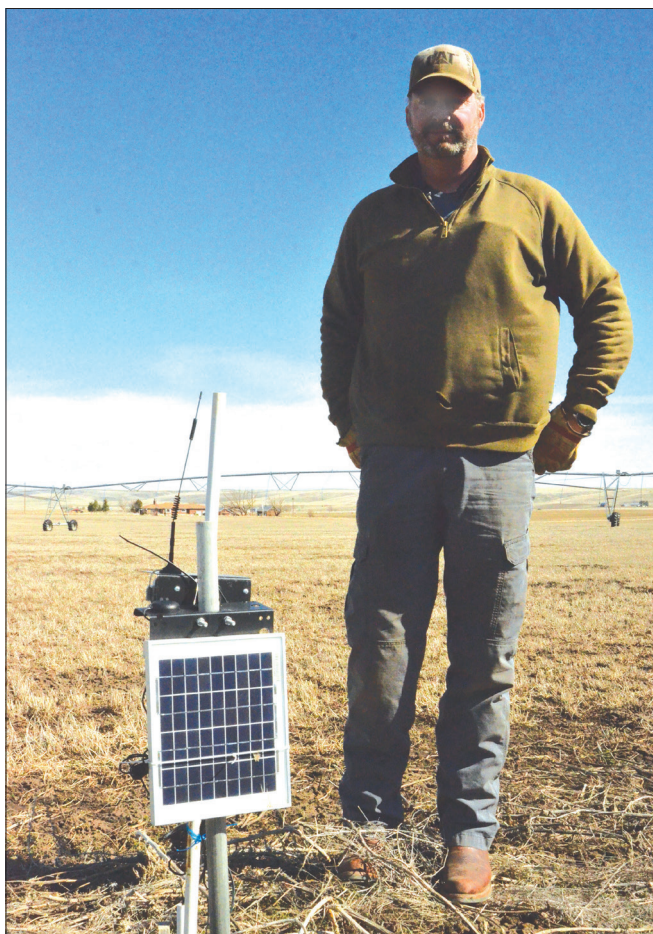
"Most of our soils around here are fairly shallow," he added. "We're really relying on some April, May and June rains."

He said areas such as the Palouse in Idaho and Washington have deeper topsoil with a greater moisture-holding capacity per foot.

"They can get away with more wintertime moisture storing for the following year," Kurt said.

"Going into spring, I feel fairly good about where we're at. It's really important to get more rain for dryland (nonirrigated) ground."

Patrick Thiel, of the



Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain  
**Mark Butterfield stands by a soil moisture monitor on land he farms east of Joseph on Thursday, April 1, 2021. He said the monitor indicates the moisture is looking good for the upcoming planting season.**

all-organic Prairie Creek Farms, also isn't worried about the soil moisture. He's confident the mountain structure around the valley adds considerably to the moisture needs of farmers.

"Because of the mountain structure, we're really consistent in getting that moisture storage," he said. "But that could really change in summer if it gets warmer. ... I usually need to irrigate

in September and October where most don't."

Unlike most farmers in the valley, Thiel's farm is almost entirely row crops — different varieties of potatoes, beets, carrots and quinoa on three plots of land near Joseph, on the East Moraine and near Lostine.

Unlike grain and hay growers, many of whom will start field work in a week or two, Thiel's prime planting

season is May and June.

"I've only got a certain number of growing days," he said. "I tend to be later."

But he's been watching the weather and getting prepared, both as a farmer and as a volunteer firefighter. What he's seen has his optimism up.

"We have been in a La Nina cycle," he said. "It gives me comfort as a farmer, too."

While many farmers rely on Oregon SNOTEL or other soil moisture reports, some have testing equipment on their farms. Mark Butterfield, who farms 2,200 acres of hay, wheat and cover crops his cattle graze east of Joseph, is one of those.

His solar-powered soil moisture monitor showed the moisture at about 70% Thursday, April 1.

"That's pretty good," he said.

The monitor, which is located right near a pivot line that irrigates from ditches drawing water from the irrigation district, provides information via an app he reads on his cellphone. He said when the moisture gets too dry, he can turn on the pivot line — after May 1.

"You can read it from anywhere — heck, I could go to Jamaica, though I wouldn't advise that," he joked.

Butterfield won't get started in earnest for a couple of weeks. For now, he's just doing a little harrowing — minimal cultivation — and rolling flat last year's alfalfa hay.

"It's super early," he said.

# Soil:

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ers' in no-till," said Mark Butterfield, who farms about 2,200 acres of wheat, hay and cover crops near Joseph. "Now everybody's doing it."

While they appreciate the environmentally friendly aspect of no-till farming, a farm is a business, too, that wouldn't be able to continue unless it's profitable. The Melvilles recognize that no-till has numerous economic advantages.

"The economic side of this no-till is that it used to take us 27 minutes to plow and cultivate and fertilize and plant an acre of ground. In a day, we would plant 80 acres and you can figure what that would be," Tim Melville said. "With no-till, we can do one pass with the sprayer to control the weeds and one pass with the drill and we'll only spend 7 minutes in a field."

The drill is the direct-seeding implement that does the actual planting.

"There's also saving in fuel, because now you're only burning 7 minutes' worth of fuel instead of 27 minutes and you're only wearing out 7 minutes of iron (equipment) instead of 27 minutes of iron. So, there's a huge economic advantage to no-till."

The Melville sons have been brought up on the practice and took agriculture-related courses at the University of Idaho in Moscow.

"He started no-till before I even went to college," Kevin said of his dad's practices.

He noted that when he first went to the UI, professors there had little regard for no-till, thinking it wouldn't allow crops to survive weeds.

"Now they're pushing



Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain  
**Tim Melville, patriarch of the family owned Cornerstone Farms, cuts a steel rod Wednesday, March 31, 2021, in the farm shop as the family prepares for planting.**

no-till, whether it's the UI, Oregon State or Washington State," he said. "Even though no-till had come out in mid-late '70s, there was a little push in the universities in the '80s to promote no-till, but by the early 1990s, they did not like direct seeding."

Kevin Melville said there seemed to be a shift in thinking among agricultural educators.

"I think it took a generational shift. By the late-1990s and 2000s, they were pushing it again," he said. "In the past 10 years, they've really started pushing it and cover crops and soil health is a new thing. That's when they realized no-till was an integral part of that soil health."

Tim Melville even takes it to the point of the global warming issue.

"This is one thing I'd like our land-grant universities like Oregon State and the University of Idaho, I want to know why they're not speaking up in defense of global

warming," he said. "What I mean is, the warmer it is, the more crops you can grow and the more carbon that's in the air, the higher-yielding the plants are because they breathe that carbon. I want to know why nobody is speaking up on that."

He said there have been studies where plants were fed extra carbon in greenhouses and productivity increased.

"Between you and me, this 'global warming' might be God's way of saying the population of this Earth is getting so great we've got to feed these people and we've

got to figure how to make ag production increase. Heat units and carbon are going to help that," he said. "I'm just a farm boy out here, but I've been taught that heat units make things grow and carbon breathes it. ... It increases production by increasing the amount of carbon that a plant breathes."

Until now, producers have been preparing and testing their equipment for the planting season that is expected to take six to eight weeks.

"I think we'll get started if weather holds in week or so," Kurt Melville said.

# Vaccine:

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available for people to get vaccinated at one of the Wallowa Memorial clinics throughout the county.

"This will give people more options on when and where they can get the vaccine," she said. "We'll be releasing a schedule next week of when and where."

At Safeway in Enterprise, the staff has given out more than 500 doses of the Moderna vaccine between first and second doses, Pharmacy Manager Nancy Stangel said Monday, and the staff is continuing to work through its progression.

"They said we could go ahead and vaccinate our workers (in the store). We are right there with where the guidelines are," Stangel said.

The pharmacy had previously given out all of its initial allotment of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, of which the store received about 200 doses, according to a previous Chieftain article.

At Winding Waters Medical Clinic, CEO Nic Powers said the clinic has given 177 doses of the Johnson & Johnson vac-

cine after receiving authorization last week to do so, and is taking calls for appointments for the remainder of its supply.

"So far it's all gone smoothly," he said. "We haven't had any adverse reactions. At this point we do not have a waitlist. We are keeping up with demand on shots in the clinic, and a mobile (station) in the parking lot. We do ask that people call ahead."

Pace said the next step for the health district is to move into Phase 2, Group 2, which would open eligibility to anyone age 18 and older who wants the vaccine. She said the hospital is taking calls at 541-426-5437 for anyone 18 or older who wants to be vaccinated.

Early Tuesday morning, the state announced it intends to expand eligibility to anyone 16 and older on April 19.

Anyone eligible who wants to schedule with Winding Waters for the Johnson & Johnson vaccine can call 541-426-4502. Powers said there are 123 more doses on hand, but expects more to be arriving soon.

To schedule with Safeway, visit the website at safeway.com.

**Kindergarten Roundup**  
April 14, 2021  
Registration 6:30pm - 7:30pm  
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