

Union:

Continued from Page 16

“That was a real wake up call for me,” Walenta said. “I figured I would see moisture in the soil profile. At this rate, we will have to get more consistent wet seasons to fill the profile.”

The spring precipitation and cold temperatures were a drastic swing from the spring of 2021 when conditions were unusually hot and dry, stunting young crops. Nathan Wisehower of Union County Seed Growers said last year’s weather conditions were record setting.

“I don’t remember a year that was that brutally hot for so long,” Wisehower said. “It’s uncommon to hit 100 degrees in June.”

La Grande topped out at a record 108 degrees in late June 2021.

This year, Wisehower said, farmers are recovering, but not back to average.

On June 7, Gov. Kate Brown approved Union County’s request for a drought dec-

laration. The governor’s executive order directs the Oregon Department of Agriculture to “provide assistance in seeking federal resources to mitigate drought conditions and assist in agriculture recovery.”

In some cases this spring’s rainfall was

“THE SPRING RAINS WERE CERTAINLY BENEFICIAL. THERE IS NO DOUBT IT CAME WHEN WE NEEDED IT TO GET CROPS UP AND RUNNING AND FILLING SURFACE WATER STORAGE FACILITIES, BUT IT DIDN’T TAKE AWAY ALL THE PROLONGED EFFECTS.”

— Darrin Walenta, Oregon State University Extension Service

too much of a good thing.

Excessive rains in some areas made getting a few things done in the field difficult, Wisehower said, and the moisture, combined with below-average temperatures, stalled some crops from getting established.

“It’s an unusual situation,” Wisehower said.

Until March, Wisehower said the county was about seven inches behind in precipitation, but the amount of rainfall and snow this spring caught up the county’s water

rivers pretty quickly.

In 2021 it wasn’t only record heat that slowed down crops.

Frost in early June also affected growth of grass seed crops.

Frost, followed by 100-degree weather, is rough on seed crops, as the heads won’t fill or produce, Wisehower said.

While farm production was hard hit last year in Union County, Wisehower said prices were up.

As for the coming growing season, July through the end of September, the National Weather Service predicts above normal temperatures and below normal precipitation for Union County.

Compared to the rest of the state, Union County is doing relatively well, drought-wise.

As of June 28, the northern half of Union County is not in drought, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor.

The southern roughly half of the county is rated as “abnormally dry,” one step below the first of four, successively more severe, drought categories.



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